Commentary

Volume Fifty-three, Number Six, June 1972

GROWTH & ITS ENEMIES

RUDOLF KLEIN

A Fever of Ethnicity
ROBERT ALTER

The Lesson of Forest Hills
ROGER STARR

Liberalism versus Liberal Education
JAMES Q. WILSON

Judaism after Auschwitz
MICHAEL A. MEYER

Agony in the Clubhouse
DOROTHY RABINOWITZ

Love in Bloom--A Story
STAN TRACHTENBERG

The Idea of a Common Culture
NORMAN PODHORETZ

Books in Review
Robert Conquest Anne Hollander
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Commentary

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The Idea of a Common Culture

Norman Podhoretz

READING Robert Alter's "A Fever of Ethnicity" (p. 68), I was struck by the relative coolness he displays toward the "New Pluralism"—just as I was struck by a comparable reserve in a piece on the same subject by Harold R. Isaacs which appeared in our March issue. (An exchange of letters on this piece can be found on p. 8 below.) Mr. Alter and Mr. Isaacs, of course, are not alone in feeling less than fully enthusiastic about the "rediscovery" of ethnicity. But unlike most critics and opponents of this development, they are both long-time students of and even believers in ethnic particularism. They believe, that is, in the continuing importance of the ethnic factor in modern life, and they believe in its spiritual and cultural value. Yet there is something about the new assertions of ethnicity that bothers each of them; and there is something about this movement that also bothers me, sympathetic though I too (like so many writers and editors associated with COMMENTARY over the years) have always been to ethnic particularism in general and to the recent efforts to establish it as a significant and legitimate force.

What mainly worries me is not the potential these efforts carry for an exacerbation of group conflict. The danger of such intensified conflict is certainly real, but the fact that it is so widely recognized as a danger by the leaders of the ethnic resurgence themselves constitutes a strong and reassuring protection. This is not, however, the case with another disturbing element in the ethos of the New Pluralism about which I want to say a word here —and that is its relation to the idea of a common culture in America.

The attitude I have in mind is expressed in the disposition to deny the very existence of a common culture in America. Thus ethnic enthusiasts, first black and then white, have in effect been telling us for some time now that there is no such thing as a common culture available to all Americans. What we imagine as the common culture, they say, is actually nothing more and nothing less than the particularistic culture of a single ethnic group, the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, or as they are now almost universally known, the Wasps.

This notion represents a radical change in the way American society is popularly understood. Only a few years ago, Wasps were not even recognized, either by themselves or by others, as an ethnic group at all; they were thought of simply as Americans, and it would have been considered tautological and even faintly absurd to speak of the typical mode of life and thought in this country as *their* culture, quite as though the word "American" possessed no meaning of its own. Now, in one of those violent swings of the pendulum so characteristic of our (shall we say common?) culture, the very idea of an embracing American mode is ridiculed as a mystification, designed to reinforce the dominant position of the Wasps.

Surely, however, if the earlier view of American culture disingenuously understated the degree to which that culture was coextensive with Wasp particularism, the new view wildly overstates the relative weight of the Wasp component. How, after all, can it be said that the language we speak in America, the arts and the sciences we practice and study, the books we read,

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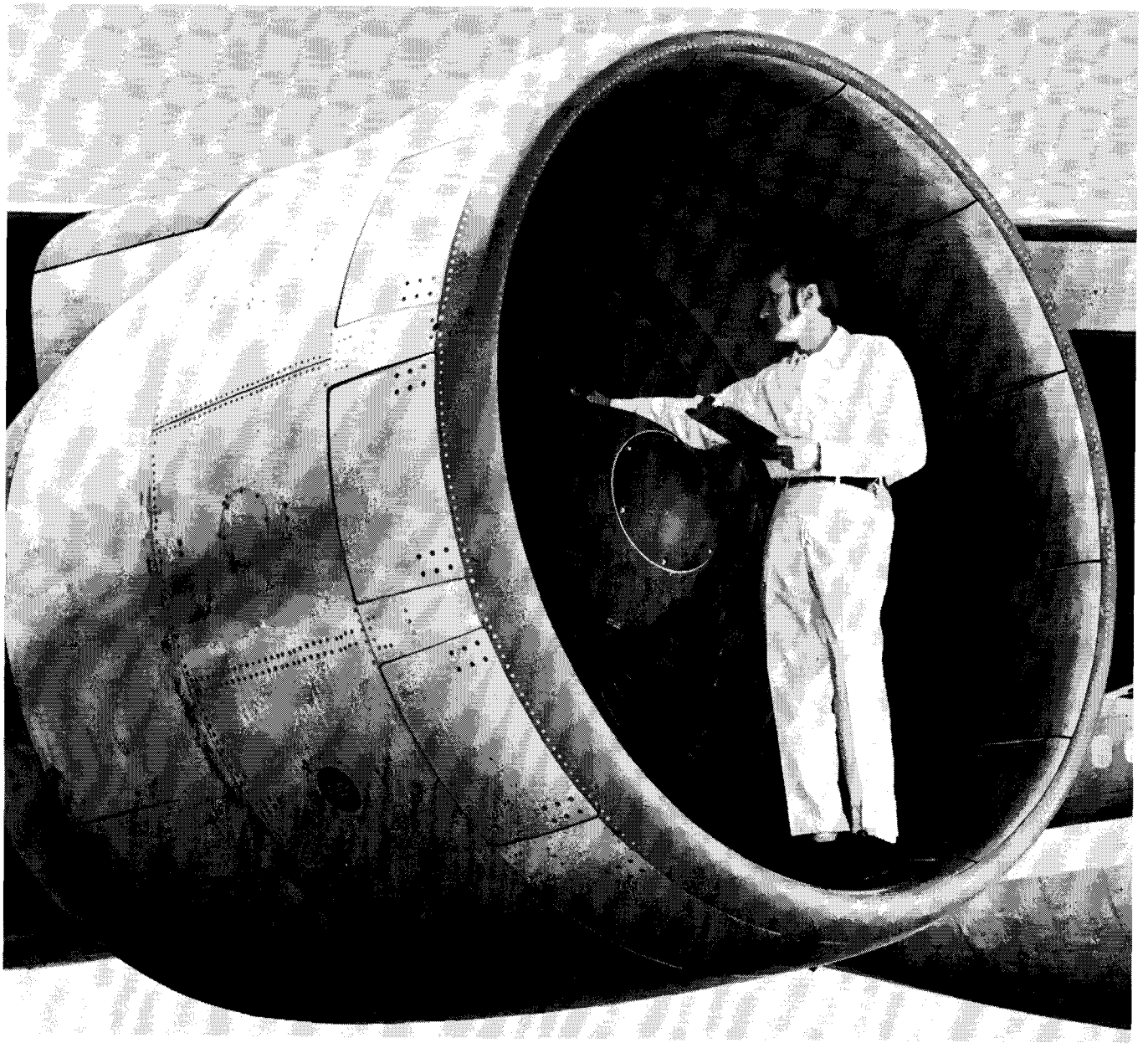

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the songs we sing, the jokes we tell, the food we eat, and the system of law by which we do our business and regulate our social and political lives are entirely expressive of and merely reducible to the tribal culture of the Wasps? Moreover, as Mr. Alter points out in his critique of Michael Novak (in whose book, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics,* this reductive tendency is given the most sophisticated formulation it has so far received), neither the sins of America nor its virtues are wholly traceable to the workings of the Wasp spirit. "Such highly industrialized, urban societies as those of France, Germany, and Japan," Mr. Alter writes, "have done quite nicely in producing social pathologies similar to ours unaided by Wasps of their own," while values like individual autonomy and personal authenticity, far from being "Wasp conceptions, limited to the assumptions of Wasp ethnicity," are in fact "key concepts of modern culture in general."

NONE of this is of course to deny that the Wasps have historically been the dominant American group. They have; and although there is also no denying that they have suffered a loss of nerve in recent years, I for one believe that their much-proclaimed and vindictively celebrated decline is another of the exaggerations to which the astonished discovery that they too are an ethnic group has lately given rise. Nor would I deny that entry into the common culture involves, for any person raised in any of the non-Wasp ethnic groups, a substantial degree of assimilation into the modes and manners—especially the manners—of Waspdom. (I myself, indeed, once coined the phrase "facsimile Wasp" to describe how people look when they have undergone this process of assimilation.)

But what I would deny, and emphatically, is that for a non-Wasp in America, entry into the common culture amounts to nothing more than the trading of one ethnic heritage for another. In some cases, no doubt, this is all that happens, but precisely because the common culture is not altogether coextensive with Wasp ethnicity, it offers to anyone who wishes to live in it, *including* many Wasps themselves, all the broader and wider possibilities, as well as all the risks and deprivations, summed up by the ideal of individual autonomy. To denigrate this ideal, and to imply moreover that the only choice we are offered is to remain in the ethnic community or to become facsimile Wasps, is to falsify and impoverish our sense of what pluralism can mean in America. Because just such a false and improverishing view is implicit in the attitudes of certain ethnic enthusiasts, I find myself more bothered by their movement than—as an old believer in the value of cultural pluralism—I would ever have expected to be. ■

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Letters from Readers

Ethnics and Pluralists

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Harold R. Isaacs's article on my book, *Overcoming Middle-Class Rage* ["The New Pluralists," March], can be welcomed, in the main, as contributing to what I hope will be a continuing debate on the resurgence of ethnicity in our society and its implications for social policy.

No one, of course, can speak for so diverse a group of social scientists and community activists as Nathan Glazer, Daniel P. Moynihan, Andrew M. Greeley, Geno Baroni, Irving Levine, or myself—for though we share basic assumptions, we differ on a wide range of issues, like the question of government aid to parochial schools, for example. Moreover, a close reading of the work and a knowledge of the activities of the New Pluralists indicate that we are asking many of the same questions Mr. Isaacs is asking and issuing some of the same warnings. We are aware that the idea of ethnic identity carried to an extreme can turn into ethnocentrism and reduce communities to warring turfs. After discussing the values of cultural traditions, Father Greeley writes, "On the other hand, they reinforce exclusiveness, suspicion, and distrust, and . . . serve as ideal foci for conflict." In my own concluding essay, "Overcoming Middle-Class Rage," I describe with clear lack of relish the situation at City College several years ago when an attempt was made to impose racial quotas. Without exception, I believe, the New Pluralists are strongly opposed to substituting group rights for individual rights with the consequent lowering of standards and the destruction of the merit system.

What, therefore, are Mr. Isaacs's differences with the New Pluralists? The fundamental problem is that Mr. Isaacs, who is something of a pluralist himself, takes counsel of his fears while the New Pluralists tend to point to the hopeful possibilities of the movement. Such criticism might be a helpful corrective were it not marred by a certain amount of ambivalence. Resurgent ethnicity is good because "it has forced all Americans to redefine who and what they are," but it is not so good since it involves "a certain lunging back into the tribal caves." It is also good because "every person needs to have or recover or acquire a self-respecting acceptance of his own origins," but when some of us press for ethnic studies in the schools to help gain such pride it becomes a "me-too knee-jerk response to the black-studies phenomenon." Incidentally, why is it that when blacks quite legitimately sought, and still seek, racial pride and identity, their action is not questioned (though, of course, the techniques they use have been widely criticized), but when other religious and ethnic groups ask for the same treatment, they are suspect?

Mr. Isaacs's fears about resurgent ethnicity cause him to fall into outright error. In discussing the initiative and support given by the New Pluralists to the Schweiker-Pucinski Ethnic Heritage Studies legislation, he has us and the legislation setting up separate ethnic-studies programs under the control of the separate ethnic communities. But the Schweiker bill clearly states that "Applicants must be non-profit public or private educational agencies, institutions, or organizations" and they must consult with a local advisory council made up of representatives of ethnic groups and cultural and educational resources.

Mr. Isaacs does not understand the late David Danzig's criticism of Gunnar Myrdal's concept of the "moral dilemma" in the country's treatment of the Negro. And he distorts my own attempt, jumping off from Danzig's insight, to reframe issues involved in racial conflict in terms of the inevitable, and often quite legitimate, collision of group needs, values, and styles in a pluralistic society. Recognizing that this situation exists is not, as Mr. Isaacs claims, an acceptance of a "dog-eat-dog" or "anything goes" philosophy, nor is it a denial of the moral issues involved. Understanding the deep interests of the groups involved in the struggle and working out the necessary compromises and accommodations to achieve both peace and progress have been the underlying methods by which we have made a multi-group society work.

I can better illustrate this by referring to the Forest Hills dispute. It can be viewed as a struggle between "good-guy" integrationists

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and "bad-guy" segregationists. But there is another way of looking at Forest Hills: we can recognize that two "rights" are involved—the unquestionable right of poor blacks to find a place where they can live and raise their children decently and the desire of a middle-class, largely Jewish, neighborhood to preserve the character of the neighborhood and its institutions, including nearby synagogues, kosher food stores, etc. The first approach requires us to label the residents as bigots and lecture them on honoring the American Creed. But the second forces us to seek out arrangements from which both sides could benefit, or at least not be unduly hurt. Perhaps the three high-rise apartment complexes might be cut down in size and spread into several other neighborhoods. Obviously, there is going to be trouble either way, but the second approach offers us a possibility of defusing the white backlash while still moving forward; nor does this approach deny the existence of racism among some people in the area.

This brings me to the fundamental reason why some of us are hopeful about the possibilities opened up by the New Pluralism. Apart from the more accurate picture it presents of the group as well as the common nature of our society, it offers an opportunity, if recognized and acted upon, to recreate the older coalition of ethnics and working-class whites with blacks and liberals. We have tended to be moralistic and preachy—admittedly in a good cause—while failing to recognize the legitimate grievances, needs, values, and styles of white ethnics. Moreover, in the pursuit of more universal goals, we have ignored the tenacity of group and neighborhood ties. As a result, *we* have helped to consign the white ethnics to the eager arms of reactionaries who are only too willing to play on their fears. In short, I believe that understanding and acting upon the New Pluralism offers liberals a chance to regain credibility with large segments of the American public who have turned away from us.

Since there is a great deal all of us still have to learn about how a multigroup society works, it is unfortunate that Mr. Isaacs finds it necessary to question our motives. At one point he suggests, for example, switching the nature of my argument from ethnic groups to organizations, that I would somehow justify the actions of the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi party. At another point, he labels some of us "emotionally unemployed civil-rights fighters." These are simply cheap shots in what should be a careful examination of complex ideas in a still-developing discussion.

MURRAY FRIEDMAN
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Harold R. Isaacs is one of the most distinguished students of cultural and political diversity in the world. All of us who work in the field are deeply indebted to his wisdom. Thus, I suppose we will have to forgive his snide, smug, and astonishingly supercilious discussion of *Overcoming Middle-Class Rage*.

But I must say that his description of my article on ethnic politics as a "love letter to Mayor Daley" is a cheap, dishonest crack of which he ought to be thoroughly ashamed. Indeed, he ought to be ashamed of the whole piece.

ANDREW M. GREELEY
Director, Center for the Study of American Pluralism
University of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Harold R. Isaacs's article raises some important questions about the revival of interest in ethnicity, but we are afraid that he defeats his own purpose by incorrectly assigning ideological positions.

We do not argue, in "The New Pluralism," the chapter we contributed to *Overcoming Middle-Class Rage*, or anywhere else, that the ethnic group should have legal recognition. Quoting Vine Deloria's recommendation for such recognition does not imply endorsement, for in fact we have made clear in much of our work that we are opposed to the concept of legal group rights.

Mr. Isaacs concedes that we are sensitive to the prospect of fragmentation, but nevertheless feels that we are denying the primacy of individual legal rights. How much he misreads us is clear from his misunderstanding of our analysis of the Glazer-Moynihan "North-

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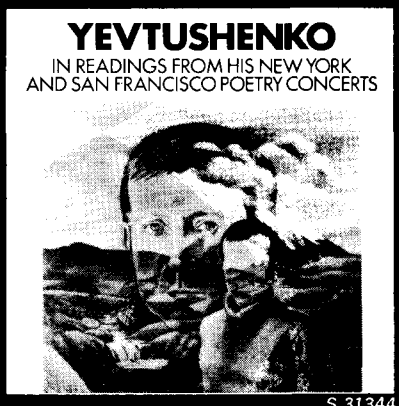

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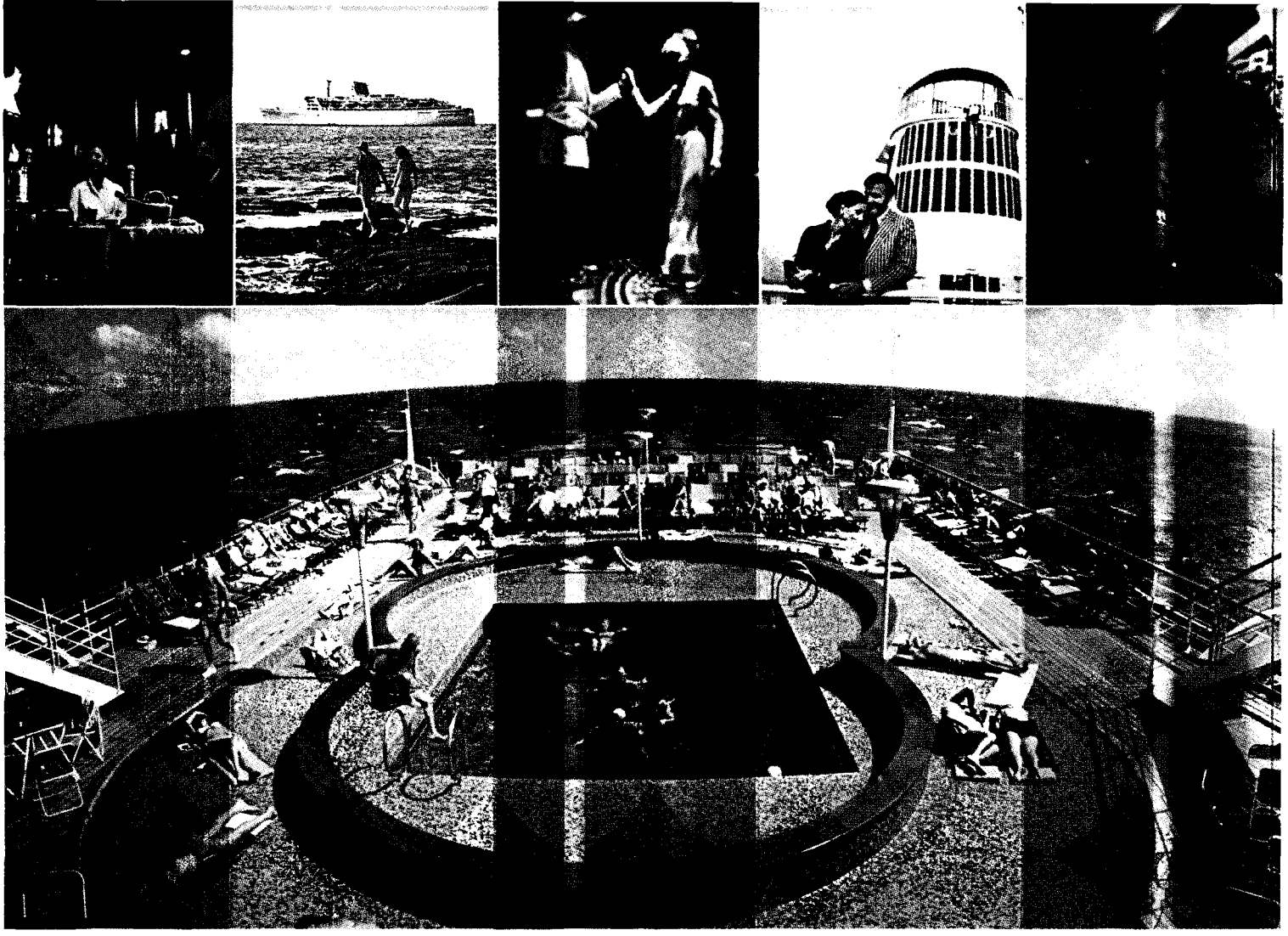

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ern model" of intergroup relations (where groups function as intermediate social structures but where individual choice is preserved). We are, in fact, in agreement with the Glazer-Moynihan formulation, and our use of the word "visionary," which Mr. Isaacs interprets negatively, was meant to convey the difficulty of achieving "some model for which to strive" (the actual words we used).

Our main theme is the need for clarity, for new definition, and for strategies which facilitate intergroup cooperation and social progress rather than destructive fragmentation and the perpetuation of the status quo. In raising questions, and in trying to go beyond standard ideological formulations, we may not have included enough caveats for Mr. Isaacs, but even so he misunderstands (or misinterprets) our position.

Mr. Isaacs again raises questions about "the new ethnicity" when he refers to the debate over ethnic studies. Are we to be exposed to each group's claim (either legitimate or inflated) to recognition for its contributions to America? Our own essay, rather than promoting fragmentation as Mr. Isaacs intimates, actually suggests an answer:

> What is needed in ethnic studies—and needed to mitigate the problem of ethnocentrism generally—is a more realistic view of the total panoply of "group life" in America. Each ethnic group, privately, will probably continue to teach its own past in its own terms, but the public task is to provide a framework for seeing oneself as a part of a group without the attribution of second-class citizenship which that too often implies.

Mr. Isaacs, in citing the dangers of the Ethnic Heritage Studies Act, is insufficiently informed as to the nature of the present legislation. When it was originally proposed, the Act sought to establish study centers dealing with single ethnic groups. We and many of the "new ethnic-niks" are the very people who have been credited with turning the legislation around to mandate intergroup cooperation and change the single-center idea to multigroup programs.

We cite these passages and correct these misinterpretations not merely to defend our own position. Mr. Isaacs himself points to the many unknowns in this field, to the trends whose impact is yet uncertain, to the research issues still untouched by scholars. If the debate degenerates into polemics and accusations, then the original problems of white working-class ethnic groups which stimulated our own and others' work will remain unsolved. Their antagonisms will continue to be directed against inappropriate targets, and their loyalties will be captured by negative forces less concerned than Mr. Isaacs (and ourselves) with individual freedom and social progress.

IRVING M. LEVINE
JUDITH HERMAN
National Project on Ethnic America
American Jewish Committee
New York City

HAROLD R. ISAACS writes:

I gather from these letters that what I did mainly in reacting to Murray Friedman's *Overcoming Middle-Class Rage* was to misunderstand, misinterpret, distort, question other people's motives, take cheap shots, and in general, as Father Greeley suggests, act in a shameful manner—a distressing business. It would have been better, obviously, if I had agreed with them more. Better too, certainly, if I had avoided raising questions which, they say in these letters, they too have been raising all along. It might also have helped a little if some of the things they say more clearly in these letters had been said less unclearly in the book. Perhaps I should have had the letters before I had the book. But if it took my comments to produce some of these rebalancing statements about individuals and groups in our society, perhaps they were not entirely useless.

I do not know that I must really go into the specific charges of misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or distortion—such words assume an ignorance or a malice on my part that I do not believe these writers wish to impute to me and a dishonest defensiveness on their part which I am reluctant to ascribe to them. We are all trying to wrestle with our respective confusions over some extremely important matters. The least we can do with words—recalcitrant and tricky as they are—is to try to make them say what we mean.

The late David Danzig's sentences about the Myrdal moral-dilemma phrase were fully quoted in my article and say exactly what I said they said.

Murray Friedman did write: "It is important in all this to recog-

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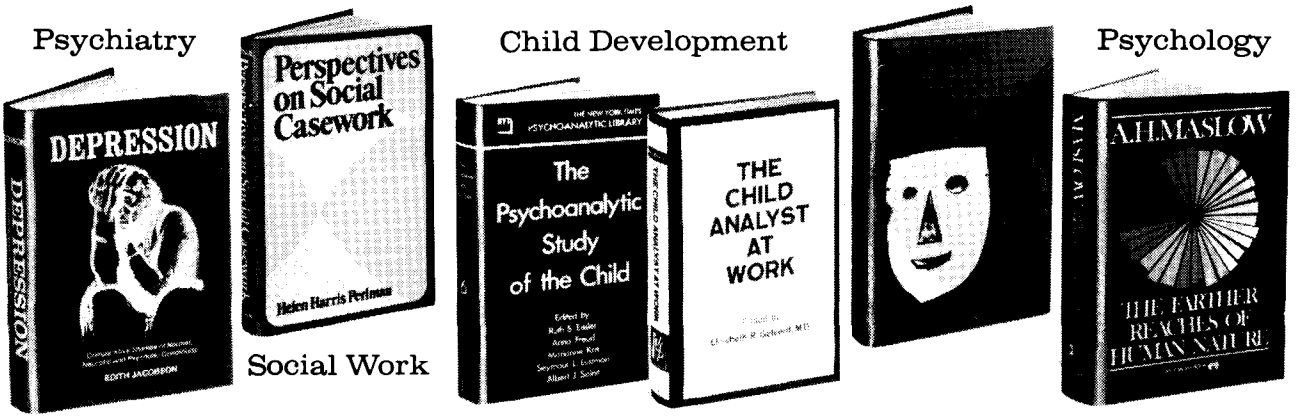

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nize that no special virtue or culpability accrues to the position of any group in this pluralistic system." If he did not mean what this sentence said, he should have qualified it accordingly or written another sentence. If it did not mean dog-eat-dog, which is what I said it meant, he should have explained how it would not. I did not question his motives about anything. I did not say *he* would justify Klansmen or Nazis, but that his prescription had to include them. And incidentally, if there *is* some "virtue" or non-culpability which all would have to share to belong to his system, what would it be, defined, defended, maintained by whom? By those arrogant Wasps who wanted to homogenize us all with—among other things—their rule of law and bills of rights?

Father Greeley's good opinion of me makes me blush and I am sorry if it was not Richard Daley whose portrait I found in his description of the old-style political boss. If it was someone else, the resemblance was extraordinary.

It is not clear to me what troubles Irving Levine and Judith Herman about my treatment of their article in the book. They showed a much greater awareness than Mr. Friedman of the problems of fragmentation and destruction of individual rights implicit in any more institutionalized ethnic plural system, and I said so, gratefully. I did not say that they argued for legal recognition of ethnic groups, only that they presented, as one end of a spectrum, Deloria's formula for "group sovereignty" and did so quite neutrally ("not disapprovingly") and at the other end, the Moynihan-Glazer "Northern model"—i.e., free choice—as "visionary," ending up with an appeal for some new formulas. I have reexamined the passages indicated and this is exactly what they did.

I cited the Schweiker-Pucinski ethnic-studies bills before Congress as an example of the threat of institutionalization. These proposals would provide federal support in our schools for something akin to current black-studies programs relating to all ethnic groups, the content of the programs to be decided in cooperation with the "communities" involved. This would place our schools and our children at the mercy of whichever group-within-any-group manages to make its writ run furthest and force acceptance from everyone else. Irving Levine does not change this by what he adds in his letter. It will hold whether it is one group at a time or a mess of groups in some joint broth of a heritage-studies commission. My question still stands: Who speaks for whom in such a situation, and what happens to all those that no one there speaks for? A free and open educational system can take monitoring from no group, but must keep on struggling to make its built-in biases submit to scholarly rigor and honesty. Let anyone do what he can to instill whatever version of ethnic pride he wants to instill in his fellows; but let him do it on his own time and his own money. In the public domain, we have to live uncontrolled by any single view and open to all views—the idea that ethnic groups as we know them are monolithic is one of the more absurd ideas implied by some of our current ethnic enthusiasms. There is no ambivalence in my holding this position and saying at the same time that good mental and emotional health requires a decent acceptance of oneself and one's origins, whatever they may be. Good public health requires leaving the manner of this to each person and to each group vital and viable enough to create and maintain an existence for itself, subject only to respect for the rights of all others in the society.

There is, of course, a real difference of view involved in this small confrontation. Mr. Friedman says it is because I consult my "fears" while he and his New Pluralists "point to the hopeful possibilities of the movement," i.e., toward a resurgent ethnicity and a new formal position of some kind for ethnic groups in the American social and political system. Well, I do think my fears are better grounded than his hopes. The real difference reflected here is between those whose primary commitment is to their membership in their particular group, and those who see their group identity as a threshold from which to look for broader human identification and outcomes. To be sure, the ethnic-niks have history on their side, more and more strongly every day: the basic or ethnic-group identity has

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A LETTER FROM AVRAAM SHIFRIN

People! You who live in cozy apartments, who eat three meals a day. You who don't know the terrors of arrest and the distress for those who are left behind - family and children. You who express your indignation about the persecution of Manolis Glesos and Angela Davis.

I want to shout to your faces: where is your conscience?

Once again arrests are being conducted in the USSR, once again people are being thrown into jails, and yet you remain silent. Your governments want "friendly relations" with criminals who tyranize over their own people. "We do not get involved in internal affairs." How convenient! Let them oppress and murder the Czechs, Hungarians, Ukrainians, Jews and dozens of other nations - your conscience sleeps. Yet, all the Glesoses and Davises can shout and you hear them - the press and TV are at their beck and call.

Whereas, in the USSR, my friend, Yuriy Shukhevych has just been arrested and he can't shout - they've sealed his lips.

I sat with Yuriy in the same concentration camp, and he had been there for 20 years. And now he has been arrested again. Again the persecution of his family, again his children without bread.

The sole "crime" of the Ukrainian, Yuriy Shukhevych, consists in the fact that he is the son of General Shukhevych, who courageously fought against the enslavement of the Ukrainians. The sole "crime" of Yuriy consists in the fact that he loves his country - and in Ukraine one cannot be a Ukrainian. And so, after 20 years of prison, Yura is once again in jail.

He is silent. You won't hear him. But I, a Jew, who is proud of being a nationalist, appeal to you, citizens of the free world: Help Yuriy Shukhevych. Demand that the Soviet authorities let him go.

Jerusalem
May 18, 1972

Avraam Shifrin

(Russian-born Avraam Shifrin settled in Israel in 1970. From 1952 to 1962 he was an inmate of Soviet concentration camps.)

Yuriy Shukhevych-Berezynsky. Born 1933. Son of Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, Roman Shukhevych. Sentenced in 1948 at the age of 15 to 10 years of imprisonment. On the day of his release, August 21, 1958, Shukhevych was rearrested and shortly thereafter sentenced to a second 10-year term. Released on August 21, 1968 and denied the right to return to Ukraine for five years, Shukhevych was living with his wife and two small children in Nalchik, Kabardinian-Balkarian ASSR, at the time of his third arrest in the early months of 1972. (Photo taken prior to most recent arrest.)

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proved its power of survival and persistence beyond any other identity, producing much that has been lofty and more that has been bloody and inhumane in the human experience. It still dominates most local and national politics and has to be ranked high among the "natural" causes of death in our time on every continent and under every current social and political system. The only "oneness" around—aside from the Maoist variety—is that of the new technology that is much more likely to lead to universal destruction than to some new universal man. On the other hand, we have the choice of strangling ourselves in our tribal separatenesses. This is what makes New Pluralists of us all as we search for some more tolerable choice.

Community Control

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I read Diane Ravitch's "Community Control Revisited" [February] with great interest. Too many articles dealing with Ocean Hill-Brownsville have dealt only with the politics of the situation, an approach which uses children as a means, not as an end in themselves. But although I was pleased with the nuance in her report on decentralization, I think Mrs. Ravitch's treatment fails to present the situation clearly.

It is true that educational retardation was one of the prominent factors which led to the creation of a decentralized system, but reading scores were not the only exhibit of this failure. Several other barometers could be and were considered in the 1960's. Parents' confidence in the schools, children's views of their teachers and schools, teachers' opinions of students, etc. were equally observable measures of the failure of the system. To look only at reading scores, and on this basis decide the success or failure of an educational process, is to limit oneself to too narrow a perspective. The language of the article leads one to believe that education hasn't improved because reading scores haven't improved, an idea the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, for example, cautions against in repeated warnings that reading scores should not be considered the sole indicators of educational achievement. Beyond what ETS has proved, studies such as *Pygmalion in the Classroom* and *The Eye of the Storm* clearly show that other factors may be more important than reading scores in judging an educational system.

The use of reading scores as indicators of success has also been cautioned against by the Board of Education of New York City. Chancellor Harvey B. Scribner created a special task force that found instances of teachers preparing students for reading exams and also excluding certain children from taking exams. Bernard Bard claimed in the New York *Post* of January 5, 1972 that 28,000 children were not allowed to take reading tests so that the scores would be artificially inflated. Moreover, several people who reported this information believed that the practice of giving out the questions to tests was an old one, indeed was considered almost an "accepted practice" by both teachers and principals alike. There certainly should have been some investigation made to ascertain whether the reading scores of 1966 were inflated by these methods. Certainly the number of times this was done in the years 1969 to 1971 leads one to believe it may have been done by schools fearful of angry black parents. But Mrs. Ravitch does not consider this as a possibility.

On the larger question of whether education has improved under decentralization, one wonders if there has been enough time for proper evaluation. The advocates of the More Effective Schools program, who are usually against community control, wanted a period of seven years to evaluate the idea. Given the political upheavals early in the history of Ocean Hill, which may have forced decisions for politics rather than for education, it is safe to assume that the new District 23, which replaced the old demonstration districts, has had more time to prove itself, and in fact, even within the short span of time since peace has come to the area, some of the advances have been impressive. The change in parental attitudes was noted by Marilyn Gittell and Fran Gottfried, and this is a factor which certainly affects the children. Marcia Guttentag, writing in *Demonstration for Social Change: An Experiment in Local Control*, by Dr. Gittell *et al.*, also noted the improved attitudes of children and teachers. . . .

But even beyond all these points is the fact that reading levels throughout the city dropped from 1967 to 1971, a condition that decentralization inherited from centralization. For the school year 1970-71, for example, almost 30 per cent of all high-school students were reading two or more years below ninth-grade levels (*School Profiles*, Board of Education, City of New York, January 1972). But nowhere does Mrs. Ravitch point this out. It is possible that the factors Dr. Gittell and Miss Gottfried point to may have slowed this decline in achievement, but this again is a possibility Mrs. Ravitch does not mention.

Finally, if one still chooses to look at reading scores to decide the success or failure of community control, other demonstration districts should be examined. And, in fact, in the IS 201 complex, reading scores did increase (see *Demonstration for Social Change*).

In the beginning of this century people wrote that centralization would solve everything wrong with the school system. Many now write that these problems will only be solved by decentralization. Obviously neither side has all the answers, but it is incumbent on the proponents of both viewpoints to present all the facts, which "Community Control Revisited" fails to do.

MARK S. ROSENTRAUB
Research Assistant
Institute for Community Studies
Flushing, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Diane Ravitch's article was unfair both to Ocean Hill-Brownsville and to the concept of community control, which she writes off as a failure. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville experience was primarily an exercise in frustration, not in community control. Anyone with an intimate knowledge of the development and progress of that district over the three years of its existence should realize that it never attained anything approximating community control.

The Ocean Hill Governing Board was given only the vaguest of mandates despite its repeated attempts to get the Central Board of Education to clarify guidelines and define the scope of its authority. The local Governing Board did not have control of its budget, of selection and employment of personnel, of building maintenance, and so forth. The Governing Board, though elected, could be suspended at will and *was*, for

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nearly an entire school year, by the Central Board, as was the unit administrator for a lesser period of time. And when the suspension was lifted, the Ocean Hill district remained under state trusteeship. In light of these facts, it is hard to maintain that Ocean Hill ever attained genuine community control, its own hopes and claims at the time notwithstanding. It is hardly fair, therefore, to resort to the Ocean-Hill experience for evidence as to what community control can do for education.

Mrs. Ravitch herself has pointed out the confusion and difficulties surrounding the experiment. She notes that the first year was devoted to getting established. During that time, Ocean Hill was involved in continual controversy with the Central Board and other groups. The second year was, to use her own phrase, "one of conflict and controversy." The schools *were* in chaos that year. Mrs. Ravitch is correct in noting the high absentee rate that year, but it was in part due to the situation imposed by external forces. At the conclusion of one of the strikes during the fall of 1968, as one observer has reported, over three thousand policemen were sent to the area. Rooftops were patrolled and every school yard became an armed camp. Policemen and demonstrators tangled and a number of persons were badly hurt. Schools were closed down by the Mayor and then reopened. Obviously, many parents concerned about their children would keep them out of school during all this violence and turmoil. Even after the strikes were settled, many children did not return because their parents had enrolled them in schools in other districts and they stayed there.

To add to the confusion brought on by the suspension of the Governing Board and the unit administrator, several of the newly appointed principals were barred from their own schools for five months, due to the litigation brought by the Council of Supervisory Associations and the United Federation of Teachers. At the same time, because 350 UFT teachers had walked out in May 1968 in sympathy with the 19 teachers and supervisors who were either transferred or fired, and refused to commit themselves to return in the fall, the Ocean Hill Governing Board had to recruit all new teachers to replace these positions. A large proportion of these new recruits had never taught before. With a majority of inexperienced teachers, nothing is as important as having the firm guiding hand of a principal. Yet it was at precisely this time that the principals were removed from the schools.

The new programs to which Mrs. Ravitch refers, many of them funded by the Ford Foundation, were slow in getting started and, as already noted, they were run by teachers totally inexperienced in teaching, let alone in the new programs. Under the best of circumstances it would take at least a year to familiarize teachers with novel educational approaches. However, the Ford funds ran out and no funds were forthcoming from other sources. Thus, some of the innovative programs operated for less than a year. This is hardly sufficient time to allow for measurable impact on pupil achievement.

Mrs. Ravitch concludes her article by saying that "after all the publicity and conflict, after all the bold rhetoric and revolutionary expectations, after all the money spent, jobs allocated, new machinery and programs introduced, the children of the district cannot read as well today as they did five years ago." Her own description of the circumstances, however, bears out my points that the publicity and conflict seriously inhibited learning and that the new programs certainly were not operational long enough to have any measurable impact. In terms of testing, one doubts whether Mrs. Ravitch can document that children tested in 1971 were enrolled in the Ocean Hill schools in 1967. The high pupil mobility rate in ghetto schools is well known. Obviously the effects of a program cannot be evaluated by testing children who were not exposed to the program. I marvel at Mrs. Ravitch when she says that "by the test of reading scores, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment was a failure." The studies I conducted for The Urban Institute of all three demonstration districts made it abundanly clear that the "experiments" were never allowed to get off the ground.

During the heat of battle and the struggle for existence, Mrs. Ravitch correctly notes that the champions of community control in Ocean Hill made unverified claims of success, many of which were picked up by supposedly neutral observers. To review these claims calmly and, where appropriate, to label them "not proved" would have been a service to educators and students of community control. To assert equally unproved counter-claims, however, is an unfortunate disservice.

BETSY LEVIN
Director of Education Studies
The Urban Institute
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As the former JHS 271 teacher whose New York *Times Magazine* article was quoted by Diane Ravitch, I would appreciate an opportunity to clear up a few of the misconceptions which still appear to exist regarding community control and Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

One cannot but be amazed at the selective perception of "impartial" evaluators. After all this time, Mrs. Ravitch is still able to distinguish tenths of years in Ocean Hill reading scores, but has apparently forgotten the conditions to which children and teachers were subjected during that time. Those of us who were there will never forget the hordes of police, the shrill taunts of the UFT pickets, the almost daily attacks in the press, the quite literal siege under which we were expected to coach children to succeed on culturally-biased standardized examinations. (It would be unfair here not to mention the role of COMMENTARY in imposing that siege; see, for example, Maurice Goldbloom's "The New York School Crisis," January 1969.)

There are two points to be made here. The first is that external pressures precluded the kind of teaching which would have raised reading scores. For those who created and sustained those pressures to brand community control a "failure" on the basis of such criteria, is to blame the victim, a phenomenon with which COMMENTARY's readers should be quite familiar.

The second point is that we did not define education quantitatively, by scores on tests designed to favor white suburban children. We did define it as black children singing the Black National Anthem. We did recognize it when students initiated dialogue with their teachers about which side of the barricades they were on. We also valued the children's discovery of concepts *for themselves* and valued this as one major component of their education. None of this could have been mandated by racist bureaucrats; neither could it be measured by their instruments.

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The basic issue, though, is whether community control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville was an experiment at all. To me, there is no question but that children learn better when their parents are part of the school, the school part of the community. There is no doubt in my mind that Ocean Hill parents valued their children's interests more highly than did the striking teachers. And they still do. Community control is not a hypothesis; it is a right. It should be guarded, not tested. But if it is to be evaluated, the evaluation should be done by parents in the community, people who see their children as human beings, not as statistics ground through a computer.

CHARLES S. ISAACS
Brooklyn, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Congratulations on Diane Ravitch's excellent article. . . .

I should like to clarify one extremely significant, though by now greatly obscured, fact which should strengthen Mrs. Ravitch's thesis. From my vantage point as the principal of JHS 271 during the pre-McCoy period and during part of the demonstration-district interregnum, I could see that there was no sound educational reason for displacing teachers and administrators with the experimental clique. The move could only be interpreted as a political grab for jobs and money by people who were not interested in the welfare of the community, the schools, or the children.

Let's go back to 1967. Rhody McCoy was arguing then that he needed to take over because educators were not doing their job. Consequently, the schools were decaying and the children were not achieving. He boasted that he and his supporters would reverse the downward trend. But there was no downward trend at JHS 271! What the public did not know, and still doesn't seem to understand, is that at the time of the McCoy takeover JHS 271 was alive and well and the children in the school were learning.

I tried to publicize this fact in letters to newspapers and magazines . . . but I was a mere popgun against the blockbusters of the media. Fortunately, Maurice Goldbloom obtained some of the information and wrote about it in COMMENTARY (January 1969).

Here are the facts:

Citywide standardized tests show that the 543 students of the ninth-grade graduating class had improved 3 years and 2 months in reading. Because they had been severely retarded when they entered the school in the sixth grade, this was progress well above what might ordinarily have been expected. Normal readers should grow 3 years, retarded readers less. The eighth-graders, after a year in the school, advanced 1 year and 3 months. There was good reason for our achievement, as college experts who visited the school attested. The school had many forms of individualized reading as well as official Board of Education programs of Intensive Reading, Basic Reading, and Corrective Reading. In addition, without special funds, we had organized the innovative, diagnosis-oriented Reading Skills Centers. . . . Another valuable source of assistance was Professor Beryl Bailey—then at Yeshiva University and now at Hunter College. . . .

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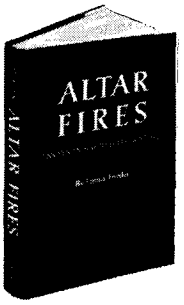

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Nor was the school ignoring other areas of the curriculum. A good case in point is algebra. . . . In 1965, 5 per cent of JHS 271 students passed the statewide Regents examination in algebra. By 1966, the percentage had jumped to 43 per cent; and in 1967 it rose to 62 per cent, 10 per cent *above the city average*. In addition, the Mathematics Team won the area championship.

Teachers continuously tried to broaden the horizons of students by taking them on trips outside the neighborhood. In one year, there were over three hundred such excursions. . . . Co-curricular activities at the school included a student government, a drama society, an orchestra, and a band, as well as a Future Teachers Club. . . .

Many honors came to the students. One boy was elected president of the Brooklyn Borough Student Council. . . . The school's "Community Corps" won first prize in the Mayor's "Salute to Youth Awards" ceremonies. . . . Both the school's magazine and its newspaper consistently won national medals for excellence.

I hope the information I have presented here will be widely disseminated . . . but to this date almost nothing written on the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy has even touched upon it.

JACK BLOOMFIELD
Principal, Egbert JHS
Brooklyn, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Despite the clear, fresh, and unbiased view of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy in "Community Control Revisited," it is evident that the author was taken in by at least one canard propounded by the various supporters of that ill-fated and misnamed experiment in community control. I refer to her statement: "Those schools which ranked below the 45th percentile of citywide reading scores on these tests were permitted to recruit teachers outside the *usual bureaucratic process*" (emphasis added).

The phrase emphasized above was repeatedly employed by the supporters of the experiment who, naturally enough, made use of every pejorative term available to describe the legally established procedure for selecting teachers and supervisors for the New York City schools. This procedure was enacted as law by the New York State Legislature in 1898 as part of civil-service reform and is more generally referred to as the "merit system."

How interesting to note in the same issue, in " 'Is It Good for the Jews?,' " the following statement by Norman Podhoretz: "Now wherever the Jewish interest may or may not lie, there can be no question that it lies in the maintenance of the merit system."

PAUL DENN
Board of Examiners
Association of Examiners of the Public Schools of the City of New York
Brooklyn, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Diane Ravitch's article is a much-needed revelation. I refer not to the fact that the Ocean Hill-Brownsville demonstration district was a failure, but rather to the prejudgments and claims of success so many "informed" people made without adequate substantiation. This dangerous lack of objectivity has permeated all aspects of social-science investigation. . . .

ANNE SPITZER
Riverdale, New York

DIANE RAVITCH writes:

I agree with Mark Rosentraub that reading scores should not be the sole determinant of a school's success or failure, since there are many other factors which contribute to good education. On the other hand, I do not believe that reading scores mean nothing at all, nor that it can be said that a school is functioning well if its pupils do not learn how to read. The fact that reading scores are consistently low in certain schools and districts and consistently high in others reflects *something*. Perhaps it means, as some critics would have it, that the reading tests are biased against lower-class students; but I tend to think that it reflects the central finding of the Coleman Report: that the influence of the school is not nearly as strong as that of social class. Because this has been so in the past does not mean it must always be so in the future. Efforts to create educational equality have been stimulated by the awareness of the extent of educational failure, as well as by its social and economic causes. I do not believe that the best way to erase educational inequality is to eliminate the means of revealing inequality.

No one knows for sure to what extent teachers prepare students for the standardized reading tests. However, the desire to do well is un-

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doubtedly tempered by the realization that achieving schools lose compensatory funds, teaching positions, and special services. Since test scores tend to follow socioeconomic patterns, not only in New York City but throughout the country, it seems unlikely that cheating, or "prepping," has seriously distorted the city's reading scores.

Mr. Rosentraub uses the IS 201 demonstration district as an example of a community-controlled district which successfully raised reading scores; and he cites a study produced by the organization he works for as proof. The facts, however, are more complex than the study acknowledges. Some elementary schools in the district made excellent progress, evidently the result of using Caleb Gattegno's "Words in Color" reading method. But the study made no mention of achievement levels at IS 201 itself, the focal school of the district. A local parents' group called a press conference last spring to demand an outside evaluation of the school. Their discontent was in part related to low reading levels. Last spring's city-wide tests revealed that the school's fifth grade was two years behind grade level, and its eighth grade almost four years behind. Not quite 8 per cent of the children in the school were reading on or above grade level. When so many children are not keeping pace in reading skills (which are so critical to subsequent school performance), something is terribly wrong; it is wrong whether the principal is white or black, whether there is local control or central control. If there is to be any progress made in identifying successful educational strategies, there will have to be ongoing, unbiased examination of all the various reform possibilities.

I agree with Mr. Rosentraub that neither centralization nor decentralization can solve all the problems of the school system. He perhaps knows that the New York City schools, since 1805, have been alternately centralized, community controlled, centralized, and now decentralized; at no point in this history was it ever said that the public schools kept pace with their problems. There can be great virtue in organizational shakeup. Following centralization in 1896, there was a burst of reform energy in the schools; hopefully even greater progressive change will be unleashed as a consequence of the current reorganization and decentralization of the schools. Ideally,

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new channels of change will open up as districts compete to improve their educational systems. But the proper functioning of decentralization depends to a large extent on high public interest and involvement. School people have always tended to be defensive about criticism, but criticism and demands for improvement continue to be necessary and healthy.

In response to Betsy Levin, I believe that she is jumping to her conclusions, not mine. My article was not intended to be the final word on Ocean Hill-Brownsville or on community control, but rather an attempt to review a number of lavish overstatements and misstatements which received wide and uncritical circulation; some of those "unverified claims of success," which Miss Levin excuses because they were made "during the heat of battle," have found their way into hard-cover bindings, with no suggestion whatsoever that these claims are unverified and, what is more, untrue.

I agree with her that it is exceedingly difficult to judge an educational endeavor in the space of three years (though I notice Misss Levin is not disturbed by those who have reached positive judgments on the basis of the same limited three-year period). However, one of the claims that the article examined was the assertion that the district's greatest educational progress occurred *during* the strike period. District officials did not say that external conditions impaired teaching and learning (though obviously they did); they claimed the opposite, and around those claims a myth began to grow.

It certainly would have been preferable not to rely on 1971 reading scores, since the district was terminated in 1970. I wish the district had tested its progress in 1968, 1969, and 1970. I wish the district had used some of its state and federal funds to devise a valid reading test or some other objective measure of educational progress. But it didn't, nor did it make any reports to the central Board of Education, not even attendance reports. I had hoped that the educational reform movement was developing a refined concept of accountability, accountability to children, to parents, and to the public; I don't think anyone who cares about public education can condone administrative secrecy and news management.

I urge Miss Levin to read Naomi Levine and Richard Cohen's excellent book, *Schools in Crisis,* which shows clearly that the conflict and confrontation in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district was the result of conscious decisions of the Governing Board in their desire to wrest "total community control" from the Board of Education. Their efforts to secede from the city school system (aptly described in Mr. Rosentraub's letter as "decisions for politics rather than education") brought their schools under a state of siege and unquestionably damaged the education of the district's children. Surely it is of some value to reexamine the frequently made statement that minority children learn best when their schools are enveloped in political controversy.

As I read Mr. Isaacs's letter, I wondered whether the parents in Ocean Hill-Brownsville were aware of the definition of education that Mr. Isaacs uses. When people voted for a Governing Board, did they know that they were choosing schools where education would be defined as "singing the Black National Anthem"? If parents are indifferent to reading scores, why then did Rhody McCoy send out notices which claimed dramatic improvements in reading scores? Where I disagree most with Mr. Isaacs is that I believe that parents have a right to know how their schools are doing by *some* objective measure. How can parents evaluate the schools when school officials totally control the flow of information? The definition of accountability ought to include a willingness to be judged and a commitment to full disclosure about pupil performance.

In the new book, *On Equality of Educational Opportunity,* John Gilbert and Frederick Mosteller set forth a new concept of the role of the administrator of experimental programs: "Their careers should not depend upon the success or failure of a particular program but rather upon their skill in exploring the virtues and shortcomings of the program." This is not what happened in New York City's demonstration districts, and consequently the city learned less than it should have from the experience. There are advantages and disadvantages to every form of school government; lines of adaptation and experimentation should never be foreclosed by ideological commitments. Helping a child to discover his self-worth and teaching him to read should never be mutually exclusive goals.

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Jewish History

To the Editor of Commentary:

Robert Alter's "Emancipation, Enlightenment & All That" [February] is long on "all that" but short on enlightenment, especially in his discussion of Ellis Rivkin's *The Shaping of Jewish History*. . . . I looked in vain in Mr. Alter's article for comments and criticism of Rivkin's major theses: the unity principle, the Pharisaic reformation (revolution?), the Aaronic arrogation of power, and the role of Marrano Christians and Jewish small businessmen in the rise of capitalism. Also worthy of consideration and discussion is Rivkin's idea of the relationship of developing capitalism and a dynamic economy to the well-being of the Jews, as contrasted to the position of Jews in those countries with a static economy accompanying the stagnation, or even the decline, of capitalism—as, for example, in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Soviet Russia.

It is indeed a pity that Mr. Alter was unable to keep his personal antipathy to Rivkin—or to Rivkin's economic position—in check; and did not give us, instead of name-calling in an apparent grudge fight between academics, the benefit of his thinking on the substance of Rivkin's arguments.

Julius Braun

Chicago, Illinois

Robert Alter writes:

It is regrettable that Julius Braun should ascribe to me personal animus toward a man with whom I have never had the slightest acquaintance or, indeed, even the most indirect professional dealings. A reader may after all find a book unconscionable on purely intellectual grounds, and that is precisely what I tried to make clear about *The Shaping of Jewish History* in arguing that such a monolithic notion of economic causation was simply untenable. Other salient points from the Rivkin book mentioned by Mr. Braun turn out to be simplified restatements of the ideas of earlier scholars, but Mr. Braun cannot be expected to know that. As for the notion of a "unity concept" to define the uniqueness of Jewish history, I find that idea as it is articulated by Ellis Rivkin so vague and unclear that it could be applied to Aristotle and Buddha as easily as to Moses and Maimonides.

On Libraries

To the Editor of Commentary:

Bette Howland's "memoir" of "Borglum" Branch Library in Uptown, Chicago ["Public Facilities —A Memoir," February], was of unusual interest to me because I'm presently a reference librarian at that branch. . . .

I would like to add something of a sequel to her story since parts of her article were highly exaggerated and other parts were downright fictitious and malicious. Mrs. "Spear" is no longer with us. She retired in April 1970 and died of cancer five months later. She was a quiet, good person and a great bibliophile. Her knowledge of books was first-rate and she knew her patrons and what they liked to read very well. "Miss Rose" and I work together every day. She is a delightful person to know, very friendly and outgoing. . . .

The librarians at "B" are attractive, highly intelligent individuals. Mrs. Howland's superficial and insensitive description of "B's" librarians is hard to believe. It is obvious from her writing that she neither understands nor appreciates the challenging work of a librarian in Uptown.

Mrs. Howland's article also dwelt too much on the depressing, seamy side of things, and on the unusual patrons libraries attract. Granted our branch library gets more than its share of these patrons since Uptown, among other things, has a surfeit of halfway homes for mental patients, and the Wilson Avenue Bowery is not far away. Not a day goes by that we don't have an incident of some kind. . . . For example, we have our friendly neighborhood drunk dropping in daily to panhandle noisily, and the little blonde lady (ex-mental patient) who tells me: "You should not wear those black stockings because you might get in trouble!" However, it must be pointed out that "B" branch's patrons include all races, creeds, and socioeconomic levels, reflecting the unique and complex diversity of Uptown. Our patrons range from the very wealthy of Marine Drive and Lake Shore Drive to the poor and elderly who find reading good books a very pleasant way to spend some of the long hours of the day.

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JONI ADAMS
Adult Services Librarian
Bezazian Branch Library
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

If all descriptions in COMMENTARY are as accurate as Bette Howland's description of Uptown and its branch library, in the future I'll take everything I read in the magazine with several pounds of salt.

Mrs. Howland forgot to say that Uptown is crowned by a park and the lake, a diamond and emerald tiara in the summer. Argyle is a wide, residential street except for three blocks, the business district, which is like the main street of a small town.

The head librarian at "B" is a stunning blonde with a delightful sense of humor. She is always immaculate. . . . She is an expert in her profession. "Miss Rose" is a lovely, sensitive person. She is *not* vulgar. The reference librarians are highly proficient. They rarely can remain seated for five consecutive minutes during the afternoons and evenings when the library is jumping with high-school and college students. . . .

As for the main library, I am not surprised Mrs. Howland never noticed the magnificence of the dark marble walls, or the breathtaking mosaics, or the lively great-books meetings, or the music sessions. . . . I have never seen any Clark Street bums there, but if so, how nice that we have such discerning bums! . . .

Uptown is the most interesting of all the urban centers I know in Chicago, New York, Paris, or Rome, in spite of having had a thoroughly malicious visitor like Mrs. Howland.

HENRIETTA GLICK
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . I found "Public Facilities" a profoundly well-observed, gracefully written, deeply moving piece of work. . . . To a degree, I'm sure, that is because so much of the background of the story, psychic as well as physical, is familiar to me. I live in Uptown; and though I confess that my time in libraries generally has been limited, certain manners of accepted lunacy exist in all public facilities in a city like Chicago—in the public schools, for example. And, it seems to me, there is a great failing in not recognizing this. Libraries are not designed for the elderly, lonely, disenchanted people who use them most, but rather for the few with a scholarly purpose; and schools are not designed for the restless, bitter, skeptical people who attend them. . . .

SCOTT SIMON
Chicago, Illinois

BETTE HOWLAND writes:

"Public Facilities" was not an *attack* upon Uptown, or the Chicago Public Library. How can you attack natural phenomena? It wasn't really about the library at all. It was about the fact that—by tacit consent of the more successful orders—there is always a population on the outside, People Who Do Not Matter. The correspondents bear out this observation: they seem angry with me because I did not choose to write about something else, and they want to dissociate themselves from any such connections. But others are not so lucky. There is a preponderance of "others" in Uptown. According to a recent news series (to take just one group, since Miss Adams mentions it in her letter): "No one knows exactly how many 'ex'-mental patients live in this community where poverty, decay, and numerous social ills are an aging story. Estimates range from 3,000 to as high as 15,000. Some 47 per cent of all Chicago's shelter-home beds are in Uptown" (Jerome Watson, Chicago *Sun-Times*, Tuesday, March 14, 1972). But it is clear from the librarian's letter that for her these are People Who Do Not Matter, that they disrupt what she sees as the normal conditions of life in the library. "Not a day goes by . . ."—and yet they remain for her "unusual patrons"! Very well; I believe I pointed out in my piece that the library will never acknowledge this real and important function. Miss Adams may not like the way I described the patrons of "Borglum" Branch; but I never dismissed them—as she does—as "drunks" and "ex-mental patients." These are not sufficient human categories.

Henrietta Glick's letter I took at first sight for outright satire, in-

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tentional. How else account for a comparison of devastated Argyle Street to "the main street of a small town"? But apparently Miss Glick read my piece with the same level of attentiveness she gives to her own surroundings. There's nothing I can do about *that*. I can certainly see choosing to live and work in Uptown (though not for the purpose of ignoring its vital facts!): Miss Glick even says she prefers it—to "all the urban centers I know in Chicago, New York, Paris, or Rome." But someone ought to tell her that the majority of Uptown's residents don't have such choices.

Government Surveillance

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Alan M. Dershowitz's "Wiretaps & National Security" [January] provides at once a highly readable summary of current legal developments in the "electronic-surveillance" area and a clear warning of the serious dangers we face unless the current effort to increase government surveillance authority is defeated. I fear, though, that Mr. Dershowitz will be far more successful in informing than in frightening his readers.

The problem is quite similar to that noted by Supreme Court Justice William Douglas. Dissenting in *Draper* v. *U.S.*, a 1959 search-and-seizure case, Douglas observed that the Fourth Amendment had provided less protection than the letter and spirit of the Constitution intended because when a culprit is caught red-handed, as in most leading Fourth Amendment cases, it is difficult to adopt and enforce a rule that will turn him loose. Thus, Douglas concluded, "a rule protective of law-abiding citizens is not apt to flourish when advocates are usually criminals."

Mr. Dershowitz's article stands as proof that Justice Douglas's observation is applicable not only to criminals but also to any black whose protest activities against racism today exceed what would have been deemed prudent by Booker T. Washington seventy-five years ago. . . .

This, of course, is not a recent phenomenon. Those who hold power in this society have always been successful in protecting and enhancing their positions by convincing whites that their real enemies were blacks, and that some sacrifice of liberty and opportunity was necessary to "keep blacks in line." . . .

And now once again the national government cites "national security" to obtain *authority* for extending its already overly broad electronic-surveillance network. From the record of recent usage, we are expected to conclude that the new standards will enable the government to keep closer tabs on racial militants and radical white revolutionaries. It is likely the tactic will work. But the country should not be surprised to find a further deterioration of those basic constitutional rights which the majority has traditionally been so reluctant to enforce on behalf of its nonwhite minority.

DERRICK A. BELL, JR.
Harvard University Law School
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Asking the Question

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Norman Podhoretz [" 'Is It Good for the Jews?,' " February] has discovered that Hillel the Elder's dictum applies, alas, even in America. Hillel taught, in Pirque Avot (1:14), "If we are not for ourselves, who will be for us? But if we are for ourselves alone, what are we?"

In the millennial swing of the Jewish space-time pendulum between particularism and universalism, Hillel, the liberal par excellence of his time, put first things first.

ELY E. PILCHIK
Short Hills, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . After more than two decades of incessant prodding from the liberals, the government is acting, after a fashion, to dismantle *de facto* impediments to equality, but only recently has the question of Jewish self-interest—is it good for the Jews?—been raised. . . .

It seems to occur only rarely to many Jews, and not at all to intellectuals, that Jews have thrived in America precisely because of what government has not done and may not do (Congress shall make no law, etc. . . .). It is under this definition of liberty that Jewish interests have been advanced in America. . . .

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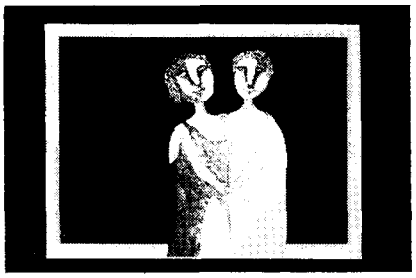

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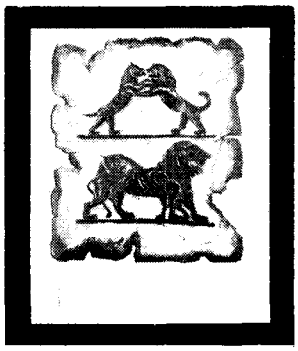

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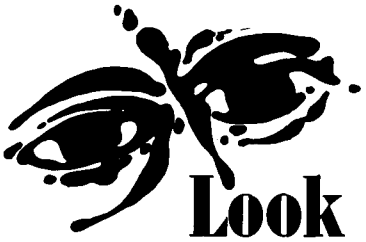

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business and the professions. . . . For other ethnic groups such an achievement might logically have been expected to lead to at least a minimal conservatism. But for Jews, better illogical than illiberal! To be in society but not of it socially has made the continued quest for full acceptance as psychologically imperative in permissive America as in restrictive Europe. . . .

For all too many Jews, this inner longing for social equality is of paramount importance; and the need for acceptance makes of Jewish liberalism not a conviction but an emotional state of mind. . . .

But there is yet another dilemma: How can so overtly successful a people admit to so much anxiety? It was this that caused many Jews to gravitate to an identification with the black problem—to serve, although in a roundabout way, their own special interest. To promote black uplift was to set a floor beneath which Jews could not fall. . . . If blacks were eventually to be accepted as full equals, then finally, perhaps, the Jews would be too. And now we are at a crossroads. In concrete terms, to support government-sponsored programs to achieve equality in the interest of social justice for blacks, who at the moment hold the strongest claim on our national conscience, may very well compromise the concept of legal justice for the individual under which Jews historically have experienced their most favorable treatment. . . .

SOL D. KAUFLER
Northridge, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In "'Is It Good for the Jews?'" the only specific evidence of anti-Jewish (as distinct from perhaps generally inequitable) activity that Norman Podhoretz cites is the Truman Capote statement on the Jewish literary "Mafia." Out of this statement Mr. Podhoretz weaves a web of fears that remind him ("ominous echoes," no less) of "Berlin and Vienna in the 20's." When he discusses the percentage proposal put forward by John Kenneth Galbraith *et al.* and refers to Paul Seabury's thoughtful article in the same issue, he plies his fear-mongering trade once again. For what he tries to do—unsuccessfully for me and I hope for many other readers—is to construe what may indeed be a broadly inequitable approach into an anti-Jewish drive. Jews may be more strongly affected by a given policy or proposal than another group or groups, but inequity hits a broad segment of society and is not in itself evidence of anti-Jewish motivation.

Mr. Podhoretz does not have a monopoly of worry or concern about some current trends and policies in the "equal opportunity" field. And a fair number of people, like Mr. Seabury, discuss these issues thoughtfully and responsibly. It's quite another thing to seize on disparate bits and pieces with different purposes and motivations and whip them into a diabolical mix labeled anti-Semitism. . . .

Mr. Podhoretz provides no evidence that what is good for America has ceased to be good for the Jews. We don't need any more Meir Kahanes, even when they come in intellectual clothing.

ROBERT B. GOLDMANN
Englewood, New Jersey

NORMAN PODHORETZ writes:

In accusing me of whipping up fear and hysteria, Mr. Goldmann both misrepresents the argument of "'Is It Good for the Jews?'" and falsely characterizes its tone. Thus I took pains in that article to specify the ways in which the Jewish position has improved in recent years, cautioning the reader to keep those "reassuring" developments, as I called them, in mind while considering the other—and in my view more salient—respects in which the Jewish position in America has been deteriorating I also explicitly stated that those who support some of the tendencies which are harmful to Jewish interests, especially proportional representation according to race and sex, have *not* been doing so primarily out of any desire to discriminate against Jews. And I ended by saying, as I had already said in an earlier piece, that these developments warrant "neither panic nor hysteria but a certain anxiety." Is this, in Mr. Goldmann's words, "fear-mongering"? Given his professed concern with the problems I was writing about, I don't understand why he should wish to characterize my piece in such false and abusive terms.

Affirmative Action (Cont'd)

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Without going into detail about Paul Seabury's "HEW & the Universities" [February], which com-

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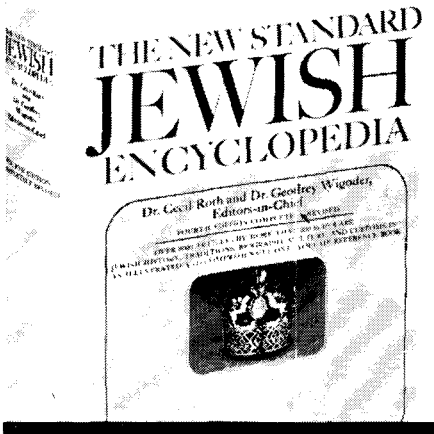

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ments on the effects of affirmative-action for women at the University of Michigan, I would like to say, first, that affirmative-action efforts tend to upgrade universities' standards since they uncover qualified women who would not otherwise have been contacted and, second, if Mr. Seabury had not arrived on the Michigan campus with a preconceived idea of what was going on, he might have discovered the real facts of affirmative-action and faculty standards at the University of Michigan. Women do not ask that standards be lowered, but equalized. Most women presently holding academic positions are better qualified than their male colleagues. The picture presented by the article is inaccurate in fact and in implication. It does a disservice to COMMENTARY.

VIRGINIA DAVIS NORDIN
Chairwoman
Commission for Women
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As a female employee of the University of Michigan, I have followed the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's investigations into charges of sex discrimination in employment practices at the university with great interest. I have also had an opportunity to study comparable investigations being done at universities throughout the country. As a result of this "expertise," I would like to comment on Paul Seabury's article.

In brief, I feel Mr. Seabury's tone is condescending and sarcastic, and that his article represents one of the finest examples of biased reporting I have read in many years. . . .

Mr. Seabury indicates that HEW policy implies the necessity of hiring unqualified or marginally qualified faculty. With this I must disagree. Highly competent women and minority-group members, who have achieved an outstanding degree of respect within their fields, and who, because of their sex or race, have often been denied entrance into tenured professional ranks, represent a potential labor pool which can only serve to increase the quality and prestige of affected disciplines. These individuals historically have been "invisible." HEW's requirements upon institutions of higher learning will serve to strip away the veil. I can only consider this a healthy step. . . .

SALLY BUXTON
Office of the President
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Paul Seabury's lament conjures up images of the last British colonialists in India, sipping tonic and wondering what happened to those "golden days." Somehow the Indian nation survived and learned a wiser course than the former mother country—or our own country, for that matter. Somehow, I also believe, the universities will survive this "crisis," and Mr. Seabury will even receive his pension checks on time in the years to come.

JOYCE MITCHELL
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Paul Seabury's description of "affirmative-action plans" can be illustrated in every particular by the plan now being implemented at the State University of New York at Albany (SUNYA). Beyond publicizing them, however, the article does not consider how such programs can be fought. Perhaps the following history of the actions taken at SUNYA will provide an example of what can be done.

In January of this year, I contacted the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith in connection with the SUNYA plan. The ADL considered that this plan would make a good case on which to focus national attention because every objectionable feature appeared in official documents. Subsequently the ADL wrote to the President of SUNY stressing the following points:

1) In the SUNYA plan departments were asked to anticipate vacancies over a five-year period and indicate how many "could feasibly be allocated to minority members."

2) Another statement said that "the University will defer the filling of some positions until qualified minority members and women are added to the staff of the University."

3) The Vice President for Student Affairs announced his policy in these words: "Temporary preference in the hiring of new personnel must be given to members of minority groups with particular emphasis on the appointment of blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Indians, as well as to women." His memo went on: "As a guideline, I would urge that no

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fewer than one of every three new and vacant positions be filled with minority members. Additionally, one of every three positions should be filled by a woman."

4) SUNYA's Vice President for Academic Affairs stated that "ten faculty vacancies were specifically earmarked for the appointment of women and minorities."

5) A press clipping quoted another Vice President of the University as announcing "a policy of one-to-one hiring of minorities affecting all of the administrative staff. This means that for every white (non-minority member) hired, a minority member is hired." . . .

The ADL letter stressed the illegality of points 1 to 5, above, and argued that "discrimination is always perpetrated against an individual, not against a broad and nameless mass. The right to be free from discrimination is an individual right, as the U.S. Supreme Court has consistently held, and it should not be abridged or modified on the basis of the individual's race or the history of his race. 'Justice' for a group is utterly meaningless if it requires injustice toward individuals.". . .

SUNYA's response to the ADL (dated March 27, 1972) was a bland statement of agreement with the ADL in opposing all forms of discrimination. The letter denies that the affirmative-action program "sets racial quotas or [requires] preferential treatment," but completely fails to deal with the specifics of the ADL's letter. The ADL's original charges were printed on March 3 in the New York *Times,* one day after the *Times* had editorially supported Mr. Seabury's position. The SUNYA story was picked up by the Albany papers and by other papers in upstate New York. . . . The director of the SUNYA Office of Equal Employment Opportunity tried to smooth things over by explaining "none of the memos or statements were issued as policy . . . they were merely suggested guidelines. . . ." He went on to say that the guidelines in question "would be illegal if effected as policy." As they were issued, however, "there is absolutely nothing wrong with them . . . they are suggestions, not policy.". . .

Nevertheless, SUNYA issued a new statement on affirmative-action policies on April 14, 1972, which contains some definite improvements. The program now claims

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that it "supports the selection of the best-qualified people regardless of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin," although goals are still to be established and evidence of good-faith efforts to recruit minority members and women must still accompany the proposed appointment of a white male. . . . And a department with a black or female candidate still has a better chance of gaining a new position or retaining a vacant one. But the new statement does go on to say that "there will be no termination action or denial of reappointment of qualified personnel solely to support the Affirmative-Action Program"—a welcome guarantee, though hardly an ironclad one, since terminations or "non-reappointments" *partly* to support the affirmative-action program are not precluded. But ADL involvement continues at SUNYA, and further changes are still likely.

Clearly, then, there are definite advantages in enlisting the aid of an outside organization with some moral authority and a legal staff. The publicity generated by ADL has even increased campus awareness of the issue—another source of pressure on the administration. The SUNYA President is now on record as being opposed to discrimination—reverse or otherwise—which puts those who argue explicitly in favor of reverse discrimination on the defensive. In the early stages of my involvement with affirmative action, I regarded it as a triumph when a radical assistant professor decided that it would be an injustice to terminate *him* for the purpose of replacing him with a black. The disadvantage of groups like the ADL and the American Jewish Committee is that their involvement risks falsifying the issue as between Jews and blacks. Some of my New Left Jewish colleagues are particularly incensed that what they regard as opposition to black interests is supported by a Jewish group. Unfortunately, groups like the ACLU and the AAUP are at best divided on this issue. The only university organization actively fighting the discriminatory features of affirmative action is the University Centers for Rational Alternatives, which is now in contact with the ADL and the AJC.

The issue will probably not be resolved until a university refuses to cooperate with HEW, and takes the matter to court. Since undertaking legal action could easily result in suspension of contracts for the duration of the litigation, even the prospect of victory may not be enough to motivate the fight. In the absence of a favorable court ruling on affirmative action as applied to universities, the best one can do is to put real counterpressure from off-campus organizations on a university and its board of trustees. This can have the effect of strengthening an administration in its negotiations with HEW, and softening the worst aspects of resulting policies. Perhaps if an administration perceives that a public controversy will result no matter what it does, the chances of its going to court are increased.

MALCOLM J. SHERMAN
Department of Mathematics
State University of New York at Albany
Albany, New York

PAUL SEABURY writes:

The letter from the Office of the President of the University of Michigan prompts me to make one point clear: in visiting Michigan, and other campuses, I had in mind simply to deal with the HEW situation, and not with the merits of individual instances of purported discrimination. HEW's procedures, and its quota system for rectification of inequities, were my basic concern. I now know no more of the local merits of the "women's case" at Michigan, although it was there that I did become aware of the sharp friction between "women's-group" criteria for quotas and minority-group criteria. I have noticed that women's-group responses to my article typically avoid mention of this contradiction; their "labor-pool" formulas, various as they are from instance to instance across the country, in most instances employ academic criteria for credentialling. They tend to employ and stress that magnificent word "qualified," while some minority groups employ its non-identical twin, "qualifiable." In the hands of federal bureaucrats, and others, the word "qualified" is as malleable as clay. Consider, for example, Revised Executive Order No. 4, which has gone into effect this past month. This Order now asserts that the measure of competence to be used in hiring new staff shall be the level of competence of the *least* competent currently-employed staff member. In CUNY, women's-group representatives are pressing this pernicious formula on university administrators. One can easily imagine the Gresham's Law effect of such a federal order upon academic quality.

The statistical data on academic labor pools employed by women's groups, being non-qualitative and based upon quantitative data alone, are no guide to excellence in hiring. A residual chivalrous instinct made me loath, in previous writing on this subject, to make mention of other statistical data in my own special professional field—data which, if employed in quotaed recruitment, could result in pernicious discriminatory effects of a different character from that which would result from the data women's groups employ. A recent, and unpublished, survey of articles published over the last decade in our chief professional journal, the *American Political Science Review*, indicates that 3 per cent of them were written or co-authored by women. The anonymous screening procedures employed by this journal in evaluating quality are absolutely impeccable: referees (including female scholars) recommend publication or non-publication with no knowledge of the author's identity. A large proportion of published articles are written by quite young scholars on the verge of their careers. Now, who would wish to use such statistics as basis for a "labor-pool" hiring formula? Yet are they any less reliable indicators of scholarly promise of individuals than the equally foolish formulas employed by women's groups?

The quota method of rectifying "historical injustices" by visiting new injustices upon members of a new generation of young scholars eats like an acid into the professional standards of all scholarly disciplines, demoralizing all concerned. In this respect, I must draw attention to the letter from Professor Mitchell, which sarcastically implies that my concern for academic excellence arises out of anxiety for scholars of my generation. Her analogy to British colonialists might conceivably have been amusing if one were able to avert one's eyes from the current scene of university and college recruitment and placement. Here, large numbers of young scholars are now being compulsorily excluded from consideration *because of* sex and race. I suppose that most terrible simplifiers, wishing to wipe out historic injustice by visiting it upon a new and innocent generation, need some anesthetic for their consciences. Professor Mitchell evidently prefers persiflage.

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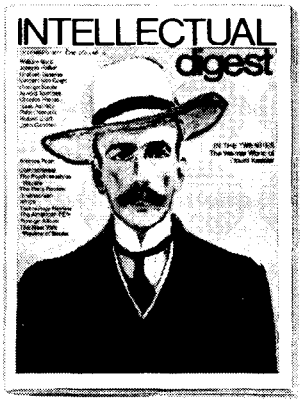

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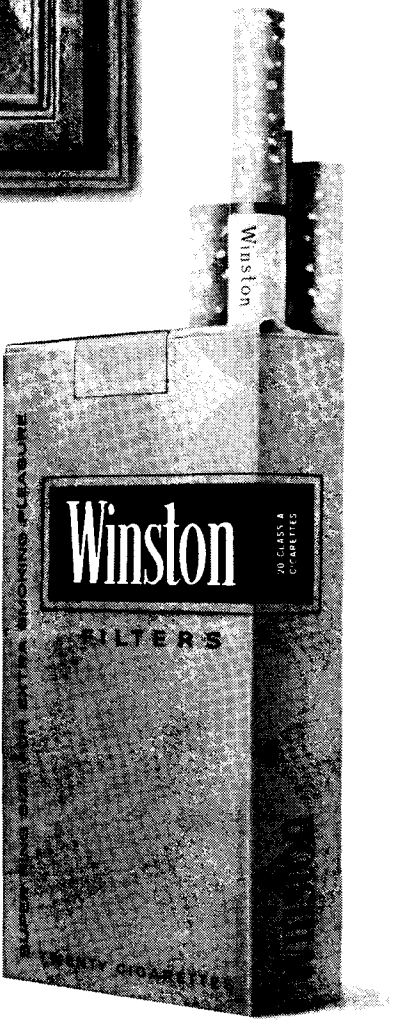

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Growth and Its Enemies

Rudolf Klein

ONE of the characteristics of the human race, a look at current bookstore displays would suggest, is that it is the only species of animal which worries obsessively about its own future. What religious prophecy was to the past, social prophecy has become to the present: predicting the future of man in this life as distinct from the next—a sort of communal fortune-telling. Any roll call of contemporary exponents of the art would include Herman Kahn, Herbert Marcuse, John Kenneth Galbraith, Marshall McLuhan, among others. Mostly, there is a thin dividing line between prediction and prescription, prophecy and propaganda; between those who purport to be neutrally observing events and those committed to preaching what ought to be happening.

Although prediction appears to be a growth share on the cultural stock exchange, interest in the future is obviously not a new phenomenon. Leaving religious prophecy aside, even the secular variety can be traced back for some centuries. What appears to be new is the intellectual industrialization of social prophecy which, like some other forms of research, is rapidly entering the mass-production stage. On the one hand, there are the academics in search of as yet unclaimed territories to stake out. On the other, there are the mass media, hungry for new ideas to transmit before they are worn out by overexposure. So futurology becomes a new academic discipline, with its own institutions, and its own products displayed in the windows of the press and television.

It is as the latest model off this assembly line that *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind** is of some significance. By now its recommendations are familiar. To avoid a "global crisis" within the next hundred years or so, both the world population and the world economy must be stabilized within the next few decades. If control by eventual catastrophe is to be avoided, a "global equilibrium" must be achieved, with the world population fixed at roughly its present size and the average income per head at about $1,800 a year—half the present U.S. income and roughly equal to the current European income. Otherwise an overpopulated world, corrupting its environment and exhausting its resources, faces an inevitable cataclysm.

Dramatic though these recommendations are, paradoxically they are the least interesting aspect of this study. It is as a variation peculiar to our own times and culture on what is a long tradition of social prophecy that *The Limits to Growth* deserves looking at: less for what it tells us about the future than for what it shows us about the present.

To start with, *The Limits to Growth* is itself an example of the intellectual industrialization of social prophecy. Commissioned by the Club of Rome—an international consortium of intellectuals concerned to "foster understanding of the varied but independent components . . . that make up the global system"—the study was financed by the Volkswagen Foundation and carried out by an MIT team under the direction of Dr. Dennis L. Meadows. It involved systems analysis—that is constructing a highly simplified model of the "real" world and expressing in a series of mathematical equations the relationship among the factors selected. The study also, inevitably, used a computer. So the book is the product of a process which shares many of the characteristics of the industrial system: in particular, the specialization of labor and the use of mechanical tools.

So much for what is new about the technology of this particular study. But it ought to be seen also in the context of the Western prophetic tradition—with which it has more in common than its manner of production might suggest. This tradition has two main themes which come together in a somewhat unexpected way in *The Limits to Growth*. There is the theme of apocalyptic catastrophe: the threat of doom to come. And there is the theme of millennial hope: the promise of eventual human perfectibility.

RUDOLF KLEIN is a Research Associate at London University. Mr. Klein, who has written extensively on political matters in the British press, contributed "Ministering to Britain" to our February number.

* Donnella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, William W. Behrens III, Universe Books, 205 pp., $6.50 clothbound ($2.75 paper).

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The theme of apocalyptic catastrophe runs through the history of Western Europe in the Middle Ages and beyond. There were regular prophecies of approaching devastation by wind and storm, drought and famine, pestilence and earthquake; often, indeed, a precise date was given for the impending catastrophe and when the Antichrist, the Red Dragon with Seven Heads and Ten Horns, or the Tyrant of the Last Days would appear. Equally regularly sects and movements would arise of the select who knew both how to avoid the doom and how to achieve the millennium: the 13th-century Pastoureaux who impartially killed Jews and clergy, the 14th-century flagellants, and over several centuries, various varieties of the Free Spirits. The doctrine of this last sect, a sort of mystical anarchism, has some curiously modern overtones: "When a man has truly reached the great and high knowledge, he is no longer bound to observe any law or any command, for he has become one with God. . . . He shall take from all creatures as much as nature desires and craves and shall have no scruples of conscience about it, for all created things are his property." The property included women: one of the signs of being a member of the elect was the ability to indulge in promiscuity without qualms of conscience.

The historian of this dark, prophetic tradition, Norman Cohn, in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, also described the social conditions which bred the various movements. It was not the often starving but secure peasants who provided the raw material for the prophetic movements. It was the townspeople of the prosperous belts of Western Europe where, even in the Middle Ages, some of the features usually associated with modern industrial society were found: great inequalities of wealth, unemployment, and insecurity.

The other tradition of prophecy is more recent, the product of the last three or four centuries of scientific and economic development. It is basically optimistic, relying for its appeal not on fear but on hope. Man's history is a progression from ignorance to knowledge, from being the victim of his environment to being its master. Clearly this tradition casts the intellectual or scientist in a central role—since it is his knowledge which gives mankind its tools and his skills which allow it to steer an untroubled course into the already mapped waters of the future.

It is in this optimistic intellectual climate that futurology has flourished. It is difficult to draw a clear distinction between utopianism (an ideal future world) and futurology (a probable future world). Given sufficient optimism—and there was an abundance of it in the 18th and 19th centuries—the ideal easily shades off into the probable. Thus in 1770 Sébastien Mercier, in his *L'an 2440*, anticipated many 20th-century works of futurology by predicting a world in which man would only work for a few hours a day, and (more acutely) in which the study of classical languages would disappear and that of history be neglected, since it records "the disgrace of humanity, every page being crowded with crimes and follies." But although there was great faith in civic and intellectual progress, the emphasis on material progress—economic growth—was not to come before the second half of the 19th century; only then did the possibility of rubbing the magic lamp of technology to produce unlimited prosperity become one of the main props of social prophecy. This theme survived even the world Depression of the 20's and 30's. In 1930 John Maynard Keynes, in his essay, "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren," celebrated the approaching solution of the "economic problem" and announced the impending arrival of the problems of technological unemployment and leisure.

To look at the prophetic tradition historically is to realize that futurology may be revealing chiefly of the social and cultural assumptions of its authors: that one of the best guides to the preoccupations of any generation or any society may be its fears and hopes about the future. Indeed, just to glance at some recent products is to realize how quickly intellectual fashions now oscillate: man's future (if one is to believe the professional social prophets) is changing almost on a year-to-year basis. Dennis Gabor, in his unassuming but shrewd *Inventing the Future,* published in 1963, concentrated largely on following the trail laid by Keynes. He explored some of the social implications of technology and automation. In 1967 Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener in their *The Year 2000** —modestly subtitled a "Framework for Speculation on the Next Thirty-Three Years"—dealt with politico-social developments but also put much emphasis on the nuclear balance and its consequences for the world military situation. Both books discussed population increases. Neither book as much as mentioned, let alone discussed, pollution, and only Gabor referred to the drain on the world's natural resources of raw materials, and that very briefly.

Now, five years later, it appears that the world's long-term future has suddenly changed. We no longer live under the shadow of nuclear war. We no longer live under the threat of enforced idleness brought about by automation. We are no longer faced by the danger of domination by an all-knowing because all-computerized bureaucracy or by a military-industrial power elite (to quote some other prophetic visions of the recent past). Instead we are told that we

* The Kahn and Wiener book, along with *Toward the Year 2000*, a report of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on the Year 2000, is discussed in "The Year 2000 and All That," by Robert A. Nisbet, COMMENTARY, June 1968—ED.

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are living in the shadow of an overpopulated, overexploited, overproducing, and overconsuming world. Tell me who your futurologist is, one is tempted to conclude, and I will tell you what your future is.

Is this too facile or cynical a view? Futurology is, after all, one of the social sciences now. It is practiced by reputable academics. It uses all the paraphernalia of science, mathematical models, and computers. This is neither the nightmare world of the medieval prophets of doom nor the inspired guesswork of dilettante essayists. To try to dismiss *The Limits to Growth* as an example of cultural fashion may therefore be a sign of an unwillingness to face up to the "predicament of mankind" (to quote the portentous title of the Club of Rome's project), evidence of moral cowardice hiding behind a parade of historical knowledge.

Hence the importance of looking at the methods used in *The Limits to Growth*. For what makes it distinctive, after all, is its claim to have found some sort of scientific basis for its social prophecies. If its recommendations had been put forward by an old gentleman with a white beard parading up and down Times Square carrying tablets of stone, no one would have paid any attention. It is because this study typifies what is very much the approach of the 70's—and is by no means the worst example of methods being applied wholesale to predict the future of industries, cities, and the world—that it is worth analyzing in detail the way in which it reaches its conclusions.

This emphasis on the *how* of futurology may seem like unnecessary pedantry. However, it is no more pedantic than asking how Roman soothsayers arrived at their prophecies. To discover that they consulted the entrails of a slaughtered ox is to put the value of their prophecies into perspective. The fact that modern social scientists tend to consult the entrails of computers hardly changes the principle of the situation. This is all the more so since the attraction of *The Limits to Growth*, the reason it has provoked so much discussion, lies in its claim to be able to put figures to its prophecies—much as in the Middle Ages prophecy tried to reinforce its credibility by naming a specific year for the coming of the Antichrist, or the end of the world. It is this which largely distinguishes it from most previous exercises of the same kind.

For although recent exercises in prediction have tended, like Kahn's and Gabor's, to prophesy rather different futures, all the specific themes of *The Limits to Growth* have predecessors. The emphasis on the need to prevent population growth goes back at least to Malthus, in 1803. The emphasis on the dangers of unlimited economic growth was contemporaneous with the first signs that mankind could even contemplate emancipation from subsistence living: "He who has enough to satisfy his wants," wrote a medieval scholar of the 14th century, "and nevertheless ceaselessly labors to acquire riches . . . all such are incited by damnable avarice, sensuality, or pride." More recently, this theme has been taken up by Galbraith and E. J. Mishan, among others. Finally, warnings about the threat to the world's resources also have a long ancestry. Interest in ecology is not an invention of the 70's: in 1949, Fairfield Osborn wrote his *Our Plundered Planet*, calling for a "complete revolution in man's point of view toward the earth's resources and toward the methods he employs in drawing upon them," as well as prophesying disaster if the exploitation of nature continued unchecked. So, all in all, no sort of originality can be claimed for any of the predictions in *The Limits to Growth*, but only for its manner of making them.

How, in fact, are these predictions made? The MIT team which produced the study devised a "world model . . . to investigate five major trends of global concern—accelerating industrialization, rapid population growth, widespread malnutrition, depletion of nonrenewable resources, and a deteriorating environment." The model, they concede modestly, is "like every other model, imperfect, oversimplified, and unfinished." However, less modestly, they announce it to be "the only formal model in existence that is truly global in scope" and "that has a time horizon longer than thirty years."

But no model is better than the assumptions on which it is based. The actual physiology of any model—the mathematical equations expressing the relationships among the different factors being analyzed which are then fed into a computer—is a matter for experts to discuss. But its flesh-and-bone structure —the facts and theories on which these relationships are based—is comprehensible bv the layman. Basically the whole exercise revolves around looking at past trends and projecting them into the future, on the assumption that these trends and the interaction among them will remain unchanged. Thus, if it is found that a particular factor has been growing exponentially or geometrically, i.e., doubling itself every few years or decades, it is assumed that this will continue. Population is a case in point: it is currently doubling itself every 33 years, with the result that the present world population of 3.6 billion is expected to be 7 billion by the year 2000.

Trends, however, are not immutable. Anyone trying to carry out the same sort of exercise in population predicting in 1940, on the basis of the trend of the previous decade, would have come a cropper. Extrapolating that trend would have produced a world population of 4.4 billion by the end of the century. The same is true of the other factors in *The Limits to Growth* model. Again, predictions about the point in time at

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which the world's resources of either food or raw materials will be exhausted, assume constant trends on both the demand and the supply side, a very bold assumption indeed. Anyone writing in the late 19th century, it has been pointed out, might well have argued that the production of fodder for transport animals put a limit to the growth of the United States economy. Similarly, extrapolating existing trends is an entertaining parlor game which (if one chooses one's base year carefully) can be designed to produce almost any wished-for result. It would not be too difficult to show that at the present rate of growth, by the year 2000 every new graduate student will be either an ecologist or a futurologist. It is perfectly legitimate, of course, to use the technique of extrapolating as a demonstration of what might happen, without any pretense of predicting what will happen—simply as an illustration of the kind of changes that are likely to be required to prevent present-day trends from causing possibly undesirable or disastrous consequences. And if *The Limits to Growth* were presented simply as an exercise of this kind, and no more, it would be difficult to quarrel with it.

But if it had been presented in this tentative way, it would not have gained the attention and publicity it has already attracted. As it is, the text veers disconcertingly between warning the reader against taking it too literally and then ignoring its own cautions. Thus at one point we read of "the inexorable progress of exponential growth." It is almost as though exponential growth has suddenly become the Red Dragon ravaging the earth in some apocalyptic vision. Later on, we learn that the growth curve of resource consumption "is driven by both the positive feedback loops of population growth and of capital growth." This time feedback loops appear to have taken on a life of their own like the Tyrant of the Last Days. As in Marx and other social prophets, history itself is on the march.

More seriously, *The Limits to Growth* deals in aggregates: that is, global statistics about population, production, and so on. But global statistics can be actively misleading. For instance, the brute statistics of the Gross National Product (GNP) can conceal as much as they reveal. These statistics tell us the income-per-head of population. But they tell us very little else. They do not tell us how that income is distributed. They can be actively misleading about comparative standards of living. For example, a country where children under five are looked after in nursery schools would appear to have a higher standard of living than a country where they are looked after at home, since teachers' salaries are recorded in the GNP statistics but the efforts of mothers are not. Also, global GNP figures mask what may turn out to be crucial trends for the future. Thus, unless the GNP figures are broken down, it is quite possible to miss the trend in advanced industrial countries away from manufacturing and toward service industries, a development which is surely crucial for future prospects. Again, *The Limits to Growth* ignores the growth in the proportion of the GNP spent on health and education in the North American and Western European countries: trends which (if one were to use the same technique as *The Limits to Growth* does) would lead to the conclusion that soon after the year 2000 the entire population of these countries would be either in the hospital or in school.

In fact, it is tempting to go much further still in drawing up an alternative exponential vision. In place of an apocalyptic view of a globe ravaged by famine and environmental decay, it would not be too difficult to sketch out a vision of a world where the main problem was to persuade people to work in factories—where the revolt against materialism had gone so far as to produce a pot-smoking population too dozy to engage in either procreation or production. Looking at the phenomenal increase in conviction rates for pot-smoking in recent years, any schoolchild—let alone a computer—could produce the appropriate statistics to support the alternative vision. It would, of course, be an utterly absurd one. But why assume that it is any more absurd than the one sketched in *The Limits to Growth*? Arguably, it is less so. For the MIT team viewed as historic and immutable some trends which may already be changing: indeed, the whole exercise is itself part of this reaction—one of many symptoms of the current interest in ecology, the environment, and so on. If anything, then, it would be more reasonable to look at the beginnings of what might be the trends of the future than at what could conceivably be the exhausted trends of the past. (This is exactly what Kahn and Wiener did in their futurological exercise. Taking their cue from Keynes, they speculated about the possible evolution of a society where the "puritan ethic" has become "superfluous for the functioning of the economy" and as a result "the conscience-dominated character type associated with it would also tend to disappear. Parents would no longer be strongly motivated to inculcate traits such as diligence, punctuality, willingness to postpone or forgo satisfaction. . . .")

There is another oddity about *The Limits to Growth*: typically, it conveys a medieval sense of doom about the environmental plagues that are foreordained to descend on mankind unless we quickly repent and repudiate the false god of economic growth; there is no truck with technological toys like nuclear fusion or solar energy which might rescue mankind from this cruel choice; for once technology is now the wild card in the pack of cosmological poker.

Yet in sharp contrast to all this, the unspoken

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assumptions built into *The Limits to Growth* reflect a quite astonishing optimism: a belief in the perfectibility of man which belongs to the heyday of 18th-century optimistic rationalism. Thus its projections assume that there will be no major world war—to kill off some of the surplus millions—in the next 130 years: in short, the book's calculations are based on the belief that, for the first time in centuries, the world will live in peace. More fundamental still, while rejecting scientific technology as the savior-to-be, the study characteristically shows an infinite and pathetic faith in mankind's social technology. It assumes that, once its warning is heeded, mankind will be able to carry out the social revolution demanded to implement its recommendations.

Is there any reason, though, for taking these recommendations any more seriously than the methods used to support them? If futurology appears to be closely related to astrology or medieval prophecy, why bother to discuss its conclusions at all? The answer is that to ignore the future implications of present-day trends is as irrational as to assume that these trends will continue unchanged. To dismiss the need for some sort of futurology—even if we repudiate the name and the excesses of some of its popularizers—is to assume that there is some cosmic self-steering mechanism which will see us right in the end.

MANY personal decisions and nearly all public-policy decisions are an attempt to shape the future, using some sort of crystal ball: whether it is investing in savings for a comfortable old age (implicit in which is a prediction that state pensions will be inadequate) or investing in highways (implicit in which is a prediction that the automobile is here to stay). The trouble with this sort of instinctive futurology or prediction by hunch is that, inevitably, it does not make its assumptions explicit. And because the assumptions are not clearly spelled out, they are usually not discussed but taken for granted, although they may turn out to be unrealistic or unrealizable hopes. This sort of approach can easily slip into the Panglossian view that everything will eventually turn out for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The kind of social prophecy epitomized by *The Limits to Growth* is a reaction to this approach. It reacts by swinging in the opposite direction, and by assuming that mankind has the knowledge, will, and ability to engage in social engineering on a global scale. In doing so, it oversimplifies as much as those who reject the need for any sort of attempt to look at future options.

In fact, futurological studies are of value, provided that they are seen as sketches of one (among many) possible options. Kahn and Wiener adopted this approach in their book, where they presented a number of speculative, alternative futures. This method allows us to examine the implications of alternative policies and avoids the trap of confusing what *might* conceivably happen with predictions about what *will* happen. It also permits us to acknowledge the complexity of social engineering—to take into account that policy decisions often produce unexpected side-results—instead of forcing everything into the mold of prophetic oversimplification. In contrast, *The Limits to Growth* assumes that while the side-effects of technological change can be assumed to be harmful (in terms, for example, of increasing pollution or depleting resources of raw materials) the side-effects of social change can be assumed to be neutral or beneficial.

Take the case of population policy, where *The Limits to Growth* does little more than express the consensus of most Western opinion.* In practice, the case for limiting population—for adopting zero population growth as the object of policy—rests much more on value judgments about what makes for a tolerable life-style than on pseudo-scientific predictions. Hence, the real difficulties faced by governments in underdeveloped countries which wish to bring the birth rate down: these difficulties reflect not so much technical problems about diffusing birth-control methods as the existence of social values which put more emphasis on large families than on rising living standards.

It is not necessarily impossible to change social values: for example, in the grossly overcrowded island of Mauritius, there has been a 40 per cent fall in fertility in the last five years. However, the unfortunate paradox—from the point of view of the "global equilibrium" thesis—is that it may well be possible to limit population growth in the underdeveloped countries of the world only by inculcating precisely those values which the developed countries are being adjured to abandon; that is, by offering the prospect of ever-growing material prosperity and by preaching the importance of rising living standards and showing that birth control is the means to achieve them. Arguably, the best weapons in the battle against overpopulation are precisely those products of Western civilization—television sets, washing machines, and cars—which are often seen by the prophets (none of whom has as yet, though, abandoned detergents in favor of beating his washing with flat stones in the local stream) as undesirable luxuries, foisted upon an innocent public through the machinations of Madison Avenue advertising agents.

But introducing new ideas about the possibility of rising standards of living is rather like introducing rabbits into a new continent. Ideas also breed, and once established may prove difficult to eradicate. Why should we assume that it is possible to carry out two major social revolutions in

* See "The Population Controllers," by Samuel McCracken (May)—ED.

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the space of a few decades, first to establish a culture of material progress and then to replace it with one of non-growth? Yet this is the astonishingly naive assumption buried in the equilibrium model. A successful population-control policy could conceivably have other undesirable side-effects as well. In practice it means exploiting the revolution of rising expectations. But there can be absolutely no assurance that a population policy can by itself satisfy the expectations aroused. Prosperity achieved usually tends to fall short of prosperity hoped for. If so, it may well be that the cultural changes required in a successful population policy will also increase political instability in developing countries. Standards of living will rise as birth rates fall, but will they rise fast enough to satisfy the new-found appetite for economic growth? And if not, will the often rather fragile political structures be able to deal with the resulting discontents? Once politicians there begin to auction off promises of faster economic growth—on the Western model—will there not be increased friction, resulting perhaps in revolutions and periodic *coups d'état*? This already seems the pattern in many developing countries. It could well become accentuated.

To make this point is not to indulge in a prediction that it is bound to happen. It is simply to suggest that it could happen. Again, to say that population equilibrium could result in political and social disequilibrium is not to argue against adopting population-control policies. It is to indicate that there may be a price to pay. For there is little point in constructing a global model which ignores the possibility (it is no more) that achieving an ecological balance may cause a social imbalance. This is to leave out of account the complexity of the real world and, by doing so, to lose what is surely the real point of futurology: not to predict the future but to encourage thought and thus prepare people for the many possible and plausible eventualities.

IF THERE is a fairly widespread consensus about the desirability of limiting the world's population—despite the lack of knowledge about all the potential consequences—there is no such agreement about the proposal for seeking to stabilize economic growth within the next two decades. Here *The Limits to Growth* crystallizes what is very much a mood of the 70's and has clothed in statistical language the emotional vocabulary of the revolt against the cult of economic growth.

This revolt was entirely predictable. The circumstances which provided the soil of the cult—the years of Depression and mass unemployment—are now part of historical folklore. For anyone under forty they are no longer part of felt experience. More important still, perhaps, it has become apparent that economic growth is no cure-all. It does not in itself guarantee an end to poverty. It does not cure racial stress and conflict. What is more, it has unpleasant side-effects: congested streets, blighted city centers, polluted lakes and rivers.

Accepting all this, it is possible to draw two quite different conclusions. The first is that the emphasis on economic growth was exaggerated, that too much was hoped for from it, and that, however desirable, its benefits must be seen alongside its debits in a complex socioeconomic balance sheet. The other is that economic growth is positively undesirable, that the damage it inflicts quite clearly outweighs the possible advantages.

The sort of ecological doomsday approach typified by *The Limits to Growth* tends to support the second view. Just as growth was once seen as the magic formula, so now non-growth replaces it: one oversimplification takes over from another in a depressing dialectic of slogans. The emphasis on repudiating worldly goods is, of course, drawing on a very deep well of Western tradition—and the final irony is perhaps that what is basically a religious impulse now feels obliged to reinforce itself with "scientific" predictions from a computer, the 20th-century version of the apocalyptic vision. But in the past the choice was seen as a personal one. It was the individual who chose to join a mendicant order of friars or give a part of his income to the poor. Now, however, the choice is presented as a communal one. It is society as a whole which is expected to take a pledge of voluntary poverty (or, more accurately, to abstain from enriching itself still further). And the sanction is not the traditional one of retribution in the next life but ecological catastrophe in this one: present affluence and future squalor, the contemporary version of visiting the sins of the fathers on the sons.

All this may seem exaggerated. The proposed "stable state" average income per head of population—$1,800 a year—is well on the comfort side of poverty. But unfortunately the habit of the social prophets of talking in global terms conceals, as usual, some of the very real problems involved. As *The Limits to Growth* coyly puts it: "A drawback of this approach is of course that—given the heterogeneity of world society, national political structure, and levels of development—the conclusions of the study, although valid for our planet as a whole, do not apply in detail to any particular country or region." Yet if they cannot be applied to "any particular country or region," it is difficult to see their usefulness, particularly in the case of something as specific as the average income of the world's inhabitants. For how is the "average" to be arrived at? Extrapolating existing trends, the world average income would indeed be about $1,800 by the year 2000 or shortly before then: however, this would range from well over $6,000 per head in North America to

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less than one-tenth of that figure in Africa and Asia (which will contain two-thirds of the total population).

In short, to talk of aiming at an economic equilibrium without discussing its political and social implications, is to indulge in meaningless rhetoric. Such an equilibrium could be achieved with only two alternative sets of assumptions. The first is that, broadly speaking, the global distribution of income will remain in the future much what it is now. The other is that there will be a massive redistribution of income from the rich nations to the poor nations. It is difficult to know which is the more unrealistic.

Leaving all moral arguments aside, it is not conceivable that the developing countries would be prepared to bring their growth rate to a halt while enormous disparities remained between their standards of living and those of the advanced Western nations. So the latter would either have to tolerate continuing growth in other countries or repress it in much the same way as traditional colonial powers dealt with native rebellions. Alternatively, the Western nations would deliberately have to cut back on their own standard of living in order to lessen the gap. Just to state these implications is to suggest that the advocates of the stable state are engaging in the luxury of mental self-flagellation, publicly confessing their own sins in the sure knowledge that they will not be asked to travel along the road of repentance themselves (the religious phraseology comes naturally in discussing what is essentially a neo-religious phenomenon).

Of course it may be unfair to push the arguments of the stable-state advocates to their extremes. However, even assuming charitably that they do not really mean all that they say, assuming also that they are simply using their slogans to dramatize the case for less emphasis on economic growth rather than for total abstention, assuming finally that they realize that most of their arguments will sound like a blasphemy to two-thirds of the world's population, it is worth looking at some counter-speculations. For after all, there may be some disbenefits to non-growth, just as there are some disbenefits to growth.

Here, writing from Britain has its advantages. For Britain is not only a country which is currently enjoying the "stable state" standard of living—that is, an average income-per-head not too far away from $1,800 a year. Equally it is an example of a society which, quite involuntarily, has for the past few years had a non-growth economy (only now is the economy picking itself up from the floor where it has been for so long). What is more, it is a society which has a strong political system, a homogeneous social culture, and despite the presence of colored immigrants, no racial conflicts on the United States scale. Here, if anywhere, there should be the model of the global-equilibrium society.

But if Britain is indeed to be taken as a model, then the prospect is gloomy. The experience of Britain would suggest that a non-growth society can produce as many and as unpleasant stresses on the social and political economy as industrial growth can impose on the ecological and natural resources of the globe. The stable-state advocates argue that growth does not guarantee greater social equality or justice. But the experience of Britain shows that stagnation (even under a Labour government ideologically sympathetic to equality) is no more helpful. Resentment of continuing inequalities is compounded by resentment of unemployment and of the failure of living standards to rise. For poverty is not just relative. Rising standards can and do mean better food, better housing, and better clothes for people. And at the current British standard of living—the "standard" for the future, let it be remembered—these sorts of improvements still matter very much. Although Britain probably has better housing conditions than most Western European countries, 13 per cent of households still lack private bathrooms and 12 per cent still live in houses or flats officially classified as unfit for human habitation. More than a third of households have no refrigerator or cooling machine, 55 per cent have no car, 65 per cent have no telephone, and 70 per-cent have no central heating.

By the standards of Africa and Asia these are not symptoms of deprivation. But neither are they symptoms of an over-gadgeted, over-cosseted society. More important, the experience of the 1964-70 Labour government suggests that if the aims of policy are to be to increase equality and to spend more on social services like health and education, then it is only politically possible to achieve them at a time of economic growth (which is not to suggest that economic growth in itself guarantees more radical social policies; it may be a necessary, but is certainly not a sufficient, condition). The Labour government did not manage to achieve growth, failed to secure its other aims, and was defeated at the polls. What is more, there was a noticeable crisis of confidence in the political system as such and some signs of rising social tension, as shown in the increased number of strikes.

It is, of course, possible to argue that such social stresses reflect the pains of growth and not of stagnation. This is the position of E. J. Mishan, for example, who maintains that the British people were happier and more contented in 1951 while still in the postwar era of rationing and austerity.* This, as he himself recognizes, is an unresolvable argument since no one is in a position to measure happiness and contentment. However, there are some points which need stressing. The first is that it is clearly nonsense to

* Commentary, Letters from Readers, January 1972.

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present the argument as though it were a straight choice between growth and non-growth. Growth in Britain, as everywhere else, has had many unpleasant effects: the destruction of old buildings and communities, pollution by noise and fume, and, possibly, the introduction of a more hectic and therefore less satisfying life-style for some people. But it is perfectly logical to concede all this to Mishan and yet to repudiate his conclusion, since equally clearly growth has brought many advantages to a great many people in Britain. The real question is whether the penalties of growth outweigh the advantages. Here it is worth stressing that the majority of the British people have repudiated the anti-growth verdict: over the past 20 years at successive general elections they have consistently voted for the party which, in their view, would deliver the fastest growth rate. It may be that the British voters are misguided about what makes them happy and contented; equally, though, it may be that they are better placed to know than Mr. Mishan. The other point that needs stressing is that the balance sheet of advantages and penalties of growth may well work out differently for different sections of a community. Thus growth tends to threaten traditional middle-class values: it is felt to be disruptive and unpleasant precisely because it turns minority privileges into majority ones—because it means crowded roads, crowded beaches, and so on.

To share these traditional values—and to fear their erosion—should not necessarily mean accepting the anti-growth argument, though. Arguably, only when the majority of a population have achieved middle-class standards of living will they also accept middle-class standards of values—and be prepared to give priority to, say, anti-pollution measures over consumer durables. In the meantime, lamenting the consequences of the popularization of prosperity begs precisely the same questions on a domestic scale as it does on the international scale. Do the anti-growth advocates assume that the existing social and economic structure of society will somehow be frozen—and that the present inequalities (which in Britain, as elsewhere, are considerable) will become happily accepted? Or do they assume a political system which insures that non-growth does not become a synonym for perpetuating existing inequalities —that economic stagnation can be reconciled with social change?

It is at this point in the argument that the advocates of global equilibrium throw up their hands in horror at the assumption that such minor political problems as the distribution of income among countries or within individual societies cannot be overcome under the threat of catastrophe. Suddenly it appears that although the technologists and scientists cannot solve the problems of increasing food yields, recycling raw materials, or stopping pollution, politicians can square the circle of reconciling everyone to the social and economic consequences of global equilibrium.

THIS, of course, is a nonsense assumption. If anything it would, on past experience, be much more plausible to make the opposite assumption: that the social consequences of trying to achieve a global equilibrium would lead to conflict, the collapse of existing political systems, and, most likely, war between societies competing for their rations of fixed resources. Even conceding that eventually it might be possible to enforce an equilibrium, the costs of doing so might well be heavier than the (in any case problematic and uncertain) costs of refusing to be panicked into taking the ecological doomsday slogans at face value.

No one can be certain that these slogans are wrong, any more than their proponents can be certain that they are right. Indeed it is probably worth taking out a collective insurance policy on their turning out to be at least partially right: by taxing polluters, by spending more on environmental preservation, and so on (all policies, it must be stressed, which are urgently desirable in themselves and worth pursuing in order to make life more pleasant here and now even if there were no threat of ultimate catastrophe). What is really wrong—alarmingly wrong—is the fact that they are slogans, and no more. Just as the 50's and 60's spawned the slogans reflecting the fear of a nuclear holocaust, so now the 70's have produced the slogans born of the fears of an ecological cataclysm, and no doubt the 80's will make their own, distinctive contribution.

It is not ignoble to be afraid of being blown up by an H-bomb, any more than it is ignoble to fear the degeneration of the physical world in which our children will live. Indeed it is right to be angry and aroused. But it is desperately important that complex problems should not be reduced to the simple symmetry required of systems analysis. This is, if anything, the final surrender to technology—to adjust our own vision of our problems to the technical necessities of feeding them into a computer. For the inevitable result is to produce an equally simple answer, whose very simplicity makes it unfit as a guide to action. To the extent that the complex interaction of economic, ecological, social, and political factors makes prediction hazardous, the best prophets are those who allow for uncertainty: who do not sell the future like a patent medicine but persuade mankind to make continual running adjustments to what, after all, is a continually changing future.

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The Lesson of Forest Hills

Roger Starr

THE conflict triggered by the attempt to build a low-income public-housing project in the Forest Hills section of New York has raised a great many difficult and unpleasant issues. Underlying all of them, however, is the general question of "scatter-site housing"—the policy, that is, of deliberately placing low-income housing in middle-income neighborhoods. Considering how much resistance this policy can stimulate, and how much bitterness follows each demonstration of resistance, there has been astonishingly little effort to examine the ideas behind it. On the contrary, the value of scatter-site housing has simply been taken as self-evident by many liberals, by many officials of the federal government, and by many members of Congress. So much has this been the case that one is hard-put to find a clearly stated rationale for the policy that can be examined and considered on its merits. Nevertheless, the absence of such a rationale has not prevented the Department of Housing and Urban Development from placing the power of the federal goverment behind scatter-site housing by effectively forbidding the disbursement of any further federal subsidies for housing in areas in which black or poor people already live.

In general, the advocates of scatter-site housing seem to believe that sprinkling low-income families in relatively expensive neighborhoods will make a significant contribution to the advancement of the poor (and particularly the non-white poor) in American cities. If, by definition, scatter-site housing cannot be numerically significant, its significance must be symbolic: it must demonstrate that higher-income families stand ready spontaneously to embrace these newcomers, or that city officials will force their acceptance. The wrath of Forest Hills soured the symbol, and in the turbulent aftermath it should have become clear that the city's elected officials cannot paste smiles of welcome on the faces of their belligerent constituents. Nor are they likely to try, easily preferring to abort any similar proposal that might provoke a similarly surly response.

But by no means do all proponents of scatter-site housing regard the difficulties over Forest Hills as conclusive. Some seek to explain these difficulties by attributing them to the size of this particular project. Forest Hills, involving three high-rise buildings and 840 families, may indeed be too big, but there is little evidence that a smaller project would have engendered less vigorous opposition. Thus a project approved for the Lindenwood area of Queens has now been killed by local opposition even though it was to hold little more than half the people of the Forest Hills project, in buildings only about one-third as high.

Others have attributed the trouble in Forest Hills to bigotry which, they argue, deserves little or no consideration. It would be hard to maintain convincingly that there are no bigots in Forest Hills, but racial bigotry cannot be the reason why a black middle-class group living in the Baisley Park neighborhood of Queens objected strongly to a 200-unit scatter-site project planned for that area in the same year as the Forest Hills project. In fact, the Baisley Park opposition, with the support of the same New York State NAACP chapter which has been very outspoken in castigating the present opponents of Forest Hills, succeeded in having the project withdrawn from consideration even before it came to a public hearing. At a private meeting in the office of the then Borough President of Queens, I heard people who claimed to be representatives of the Baisley Park neighborhood saying almost exactly the same things which the alleged representatives of the Forest Hills residents now say. They told the Borough President that the project was to be put in their neighborhood because the Mayor didn't care about their views, felt they were powerless, and was quite prepared to sacrifice them and their homes and their property values to his political ambitions.

Still another argument is that scatter-site housing would have been entirely successful in Forest Hills if there had been more "involvement" of the "community" from the beginning. Yet one of the specific irritants arose from too much, not too little, local consultation. As a portent of

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architectural wonders to come, the original design of the project was widely shown in the area after the plan had been approved. When this design turned out to be too expensive for federal subsidization, the consultation itself was taken as proof of an intent to deceive the local people.

IF IT has always been hard to find a clearly stated rationale in writing for scatter-site housing, one could get at some of the reasons behind the policy in conversation with the New York City officials who were responsible for the original development of the program in 1966. These officials held the view that a neighborhood which contains people with a wide variation of incomes is *better* than an economically homogeneous neighborhood; and they further believed—as apparently federal housing officials have also come to do—that government has the right and the duty to foster the development of such heterogenous neighborhoods.

The enthusiasm of New York's officials for scatter-site housing did not rest simply on the effects they expected it to have on the mostly nonwhite poor people who would be moved into more prosperous neighborhoods inhabited mostly by whites. They believed that scattering low-rent units in middle-class areas would also have a healthy effect on the middle-class residents of those areas who would perforce become more tolerant and more worldly—more, in short, like residents of the West Side of Manhattan, from which the key figures in the Lindsay administration's early housing program themselves largely came.

The West Side of Manhattan, lying roughly between 59th and 125th Streets, and between Central Park and the Hudson River, becomes crucial to any discussion of housing integration not only because the impulse to scatter-site housing started there, but because it actually reflects, perhaps uniquely among American neighborhoods, a consistent pattern of juxtaposition of high-rent and low-rent housing. Only one city block separates the luxurious apartment houses of Central Park West from the tenements of Columbus Avenue; only a few steps separate those same tenements from the stone row houses that were built on the side streets for exclusive occupancy by the single families who could afford them. The elevated railway that once ran up Columbus Avenue blighted the avenue for any but low-income families. But for the more prosperous, there was Central Park West and Riverside Drive and West End Avenue, as well as the side streets—all made practical by excellent up- and down-town public transportation. This basic pattern of land use persisted, even after the side-street houses were converted into rooming houses or tiny apartments and filled with Puerto Ricans and blacks in the years following the end of the Second World War.

As a result of these demographic changes, the central shopping thoroughfare of the West Side, upper Broadway, offers the observer a uniquely human mixture that might be characterized as a realization of the dream of American pluralism. The shoppers include blacks, Puerto Ricans, and whites of differing ethnic origin; the stores, restaurants, and cafés run the gamut of all the many groups whose members now inhabit the West Side. Economically, too, the West Side is heterogeneous. Its major urban-renewal project, which sought to replace the Columbus Avenue tenements with modern apartment houses and to enable the side-street row houses to revert to single-family occupancy, included more than 2,500 low-rent public-housing units in its final plans. At least that many poor families had been living in the area before the renewal started.

To enjoy the apparently happy juxtaposition of so many different ethnic and socioeconomic groups, however, it is well to remain on the cluttered sidewalks of Broadway. For the exciting but on the whole harmonious vista of Broadway is not sustained in the rest of the area. The West Side, historically, produced a bumper crop of private schools so that the row-house and elevator-apartment families could mitigate with social distance their physical propinquity to their poorer neighbors. The split between private-school families and public-school families still continues; the public schools, with rare exceptions, attract few of the higher-income children. The febrile political life of the West Side confirms the suspicion that the human mix of varied income groups disturbs as many as it pleases; there is undiminished tension between the leaders of the low-income groups, or at least those who claim leadership, and the higher-income groups, generally over the question of how much low-income housing will, in the final analysis, be permitted in the urban-renewal area.

No matter how entertaining, then, one may find the spectacle of Broadway, it remains difficult to point to one concrete social result of the intermingling of diverse income groups, one sign of effective social action, which would not otherwise have taken place. Whether the upper-income residents are more tolerant than their counterparts in economically homogeneous neighborhoods is doubtful. And at the other end, it is almost impossible to find one measurable difference between the pride, energy, political awareness, or social mobility of the low-income residents of the West Side and the low-income residents of the Lower East Side, or Harlem, or Brownsville in Brooklyn.

DESPITE all this, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has promulgated guidelines based on the assumption that the case for locating low-income housing in middle-income neighborhoods has been made and proved.

Since the establishment of the public-housing

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program in 1937, the federal government has opted to put public housing on inexpensive land, thus generally reinforcing the way in which members of different social classes "naturally" distribute themselves in the cities. The government did this without ever considering the existence of social class. It simply limited the amount of money that could be spent on each apartment in a public-housing development. Although no words explicitly mandating this policy appeared in the public-housing law after 1948, the intent of the law was obvious. Dwellings had to be economical in "construction and administration" if they were to be subsidized; and the administrators extended this statutory language by establishing a dollar limit (which could, however, occasionally be waived) on the total cost of development, including land.

If not for the intensifying national concern with racial equality, the federal housing agencies would probably have continued to avert their gaze from the realities of social class in the United States. But race could not be ignored. In the immediate postwar years, the FHA discouraged mortgage bankers from making loans in interracial neighborhoods because, as an insurer, FHA worried that mortgages in interracial communities were intrinsically unsafe. After great pressure had been applied by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, FHA appraisers and officials decided they could safely ignore race. Nondiscrimination in housing became for the first time official federal policy. When nondiscrimination failed to bring many racially-integrated neighborhoods into existence, some commentators blamed the income difference between the median white and the median black family. The 1970 census indicates drastic reduction in this difference, but recent federal housing policy has increasingly been based on an implied contrary theory to the effect that racial differences in income will be everlasting.

On the assumption that the goal of housing policy should be racial integration, and given the theory of permanent income difference between the races, the conclusion drawn by the federal government was irresistible—government policy must seek to obliterate the significance of income to housing location. On this syllogistic base, mandating an attack on the class structure of American cities, the federal government founded the scatter-site housing policy embodied in the new HUD guidelines.

The HUD list contains eight separate categories on which a housing proposal may be rated as *superior, adequate, or poor;* a rating of *superior* gets priority over a rating of *adequate* in the award of federal subsidies, while a rating of *poor* in any category disqualifies the proposal from any subsidy at all.

Only two of these categories—the second and third—concern us here. Category Two, entitled "Minority Housing Opportunities," permits officials to rate as *superior* only those proposals which would open up areas for "minority-group" residence in which there are few or no members of such groups now living. The wording of the criterion specifically excludes from a *superior* rating any project which would stand in an existing racially-mixed area except if the area were part of an officially planned redevelopment, and it could be proved that "sufficient, comparable opportunities exist for housing for minority families, in the income range to be served by the proposed project, outside the area of minority concentration." Obviously, if there were such housing opportunities already available elsewhere, it would be unnecessary to rebuild the slum in the first place.

Otherwise the best a project in a racially-mixed area can hope for is a rating of *adequate*, and then only if it can be shown that "the project will not cause a significant increase in the proportion of minority to non-minority residents in the area." As a footnote, the guidelines require that these stipulations must be "accompanied by documented findings based upon relevant racial, socioeconomic, and other data and information." This means that if any sponsor—a government agency, a nonprofit group, a profit-motivated builder, whatever—wishes to erect a government-subsidized apartment house in a racially-mixed area, the sponsor can get approval only after demonstrating that the racial distribution of the new tenants will be in the same proportion as the racial distribution already obtaining in the area. If the government believes anyone can promise this without installing a quota system for tenant selection, it has failed to explain how.

As for a project in an area of minority-group concentration, it can be considered *adequate* only if it is necessary "to meet overriding housing needs." An explanatory note points out that a need resulting from exclusionary practices elsewhere does satisfy the criterion. This last seems fair enough, given the premises. It does not seem fair, however, that a proposal for subsidized new housing to be built in an area, say, of black concentration must be disapproved even if, demonstrably, the people living in that area want to remain there and also want an opportunity to improve the quality of their housing. Is improving housing quality to be considered an "overriding housing need"? The federal government tells every minority group in the nation that its members are free to live wherever they want, yet under this rule, if they want to live in the neighborhoods in which they are already living, they had better be able to show that they are camping on the sidewalk.

Thus, by an irony which is becoming familiar in other fields of government activity as well,

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measures aimed at expanding the freedom of non-whites are actually having the effect of limiting that freedom. In this case, government policy allows non-whites the choice of living in predominantly non-white areas—a choice which many might wish to make and should certainly have the right to make—only at the sacrifice of any chance to get better housing. A judgment has been rendered to the effect that a neighborhood composed predominantly of non-whites is not good enough to deserve federal support, whatever may be the wishes of its members.

Furthermore—and here we have another irony emerging from Washington's integrationist activism—the implied promise, that the federal government will supply adequate housing for non-whites in predominantly white sections, is itself illusory. Although the federal government has the power to prevent housing from being built, it has no power to force the construction of housing in a local area over the expressed will of the government of that area. Thus, the suspicion arises that one reason for the development of the new guidelines of site selection may be the desire of the present Housing administration—following, no doubt, policy established in the White House or the Budget Bureau—to avoid paying out subsidies for new housing. The federal pocketbook will be protected on both flanks. Local governments will not wish to build in areas that are not already occupied by non-whites, and the federal guidelines will forbid them to build anywhere else, on sites which are mixed or occupied predominantly by minorities. There being nowhere else to build, nothing will be built.

As CATEGORY TWO of the HUD guidelines seeks to promote racial integration, Category Three seeks to promote socioecomonic integration. This category, "Improved Location for low(er) Income Families," starts bravely with a few general assertions amounting to a pledge by the government to provide "low (er) income" households with a wide choice of locations. Incidentally, that e.e. cummings-like word "low (er)" serves to remind the reader that government guidelines apply not merely to public housing for low-income families, but also to other forms of subsidized housing which is offered to families with somewhat higher incomes. In the peculiar language that takes shape on the electric typewriters of government, "lower" means "less low than low." Low-income housing is for people whose income is as low as possible, and who therefore are eligible for public housing. Lower-income housing, however, is for families whose income is generally below the median level, which includes many whose income is still too high for low-income public housing.

Once we have scrambled over this curious linguistic barrier, we come to the two final objectives: that subsidized housing should be served with all the facilities and utilities that unsubsidized housing is served with; and that subsidized housing should be "reasonably accessible" to job opportunities. These, in a simpler day, would have been the two primary requirements for selecting housing location. Now, however, they have become subsidiary to the objective of separating some subsidized housing from other subsidized housing, of dividing some low-income people from other low-income people. Here again, as with racial integration, a realistic appraisal of the government's actual powers in this field leaves one wondering what choice it is really in a position to offer. Since it cannot *require* housing to be built in a particular location, its refusal to permit federally-subsidized housing to be located "in a section characterized as one of subsidized housing," may well mean that federally-subsidized housing will not be built anywhere at all. Surely this provision will prevent the systematic upgrading of low-income neighborhoods, even if they are favorably located with respect to jobs and transportation.

Obviously, no one would want to locate a single subsidized project by itself in the midst of a decayed low-income neighborhood. Once the neighborhood is decayed and no longer economically self-sustaining, only federal subsidies can possibly resuscitate its housing. But the federal guidelines, placing their primary emphasis on integrating low-income families into unsubsidized middle-class neighborhoods, would rule out placing subsidized buildings—not only public housing, but any kind of subsidized buildings—in sufficient proximity to protect each other from the decayed surroundings.

IT SHOULD BE easy to bring forth a more constructive set of housing policies than these, leaving aside that gloomiest of all dismal subjects, the *who* and *how* of economic subsidization of housing. As to the end and purpose of housing subsidization, surely this government investment should be measured by the level of housing choice truly made available rather than by the degree of racial and economic integration achieved in the policy directive.

The cornerstone of housing choice must be a program which will make impossible the exclusion of families from access to housing because of their race or nationality. This must be as true in Forest Hills (where exclusionary practices must in part be responsible for the scarcity of black families) as everywhere else. But there is a great difference between effectively banning discrimination and exclusion on the one hand, and numerically mandating racial or economic integration on the other. The former lies within the practical scope of governmental activity. The latter—if it accomplishes anything at all—merely impedes the exercise of personal choice by black or white.

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Second, government subsidy programs should be made available for those who need better housing, and cannot obtain it without subsidy, *wherever* these people may want to live, provided that the housing offers suitable access to transportation, education, and job opportunities. These utilitarian criteria come first, because given a flourishing economy, they provide the means by which social classes are, in fact, rearranged and their memberships pooled. The effort to accomplish the same objective by spatial rearrangement mistakes the nature of the problem; and, worse, it fools no one.

Third, government subsidy programs must come to terms with the fact that there are households in the city which, for whatever reasons, are unable to live in a housing development without presenting a serious danger to their neighbors and to the building itself. At present cost levels, and with the present inadequate level of supply, it seems absurd to give these families good housing, which they then grievously damage, while other families who could use the housing fruitfully wait on endless lines. The assurance by Chairman Simeon Golar of the New York City Housing Authority that all prospective tenants of the Forest Hills project would be carefully screened to keep out the destructive was a step in the right direction—and a most unusual one in the present climate. So too is the complex subsidy formula developed in the housing bill recently passed by the United States Senate which, properly administered and adequately funded, should be of great help in providing new houses for families of limited income. (If a similar program could be developed for existing buildings, the help might even be greater, but that is another story.)

Simply because Forest Hills produced so much bad feeling, the priorities suggested here might be taken as a formula for social peace. It would be nice if, indeed, they worked out that way, but they should not be taken to be non-controversial. If subsidized housing is to be located where job opportunities exist, that housing may well be placed in areas in the city, or outside it, where low-income families will be living for the first time. Possibly—perhaps probably—perhaps inevitably, the opposition to their prospective arrival will be just as hard as that of Forest Hills, and just as clamorous. But the objective is different. While the scatter-site program expresses primarily a symbolic objective, the siting of housing to make economic opportunity available follows traditional American attitudes toward work and human dignity and social mobility. It may, in the end, be harder to mobilize opposition to it simply because, using the value system of the potential opponents themselves, it makes such very good sense.

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Liberalism versus Liberal Education

James Q. Wilson

My title will strike many readers as paradoxical, even absurd. Liberalism, far from being the enemy of a liberal education, is widely regarded as being the product of it. For better or worse, the liberal creed has been nurtured and propagated on the college campuses, and though not all students become its disciples, almost all are affected by it, and some dramatically so.

At one level that is all true enough. We know that those who are college-educated are the most tolerant of unpopular opinions, are most prepared to endorse measures to advance civil liberties and civil rights, and are least willing to support anti-democratic regimes. Indeed, one of the watershed discoveries of political sociologists writing in the 1950's was that democratic values were least secure among the working class and most secure among the college-educated upper-middle class. That finding was sharply challenged, though never successfully disproved, by those few scholars who retained during the 1950's and early 1960's the conviction that the upper-middle class was characterized not by civic virtue but by the ambition for power and animated not by democratic values but by economic ones. Yet even those who offered a radical critique of society found their allies and followers, not among the workers, but among fellow college students and college graduates. Dissent, in this country as in all countries, in this era as in almost all eras, has been chiefly the province of the intelligentsia.

Among the intelligentsia, it has been those who have studied the liberal arts—especially the social sciences and the humanities—who have displayed the most "liberal" attitudes. Students of engineering, of applied sciences, and of agriculture are all much more conservative. And as Seymour Martin Lipset has shown, not only do the liberal arts stimulate liberal views, but the most able, distinguished, productive, and (presumably) highest-paid professors of the liberal arts are the most "liberal" in their orientation. In short, higher education stimulates the liberal impulse, a liberal-arts higher education stimulates it even more, and the "best" (or at least the most expensive and prestigious) liberal-arts higher education stimulates it most of all.

How, then, can I suggest that a liberal education is at all inconsistent with liberalism? I suggest it, quite simply, by pointing to the fact that it is within higher education that one finds today many but not all of the most serious threats to certain liberal values—the harassment of unpopular views, the use of force to prevent certain persons from speaking, the adoption of quota systems either to reduce the admissions of certain kinds of students or enhance the admissions of other kinds, and the politicization of the university to make it an arena for the exchange of manifestoes rather than a forum for the discussion of ideas.

The liberal values that have become precarious in the very institution that once defended them are those of civility, free speech, equality of opportunity, and the maintenance of a realm of privacy and intimacy safe from the constant assaults of the political and the societal. These are not, as I shall point out, the only elements of the liberal faith, but they are important ones and they are very much in jeopardy. I realize that the vast majority of faculty and students do not approve of acts which jeopardize these values; from time to time they even say, quietly, that they deplore them; yet the vast majority also have created a communal setting and institutional culture that permits such acts to continue. The imperiled values have not been repudiated so much as they have been subjected to benign neglect.

The evidence that such a state of affairs exists is not as readily available as my confident generalizations might lead one to suppose. There is, for some reason, no organization that monitors the state of freedom on the campus, or none having the resources and persistence with which, for example, the American Civil Liberties Union monitors attacks on civil liberties *off* the campus. But if one works at or visits a major university, one will find the history of that sorry procession of episodes which has produced not mounting horror but wordless acquiescence and weary resignation.

During my adult life I have been part of five institutions—the Catholic Church, the University

JAMES Q. WILSON, professor of government at Harvard, contributed "Liberalism and Purpose" to our May number.

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of Redlands, the United States Navy, the University of Chicago, and Harvard University. If I were required to rank them by the extent to which free and uninhibited discussion was possible within them, I am very much afraid that the Harvard of 1972 would not rank near the top. In the last two or three years, the list of subjects that cannot be publicly discussed there in a free and open forum has grown steadily, and now includes the war in Vietnam, public policy toward urban ghettos, the relationship between intelligence and heredity, and the role of American corporations in certain overseas regimes. To be sure, *certain* points of view about each of these matters can be, and are, discussed, but a serious discussion of *all* sides of these issues is risky, if not impossible. To be specific: a spokesman for South Vietnam, a critic of liberal policies toward the ghettos, a scientist who claimed that intelligence is largely inherited, and a corporate executive who denied that his firm was morally responsible for the regime in South Africa have all been harassed and in some cases forcibly denied an opportunity to speak.

Some of those who have not been able to speak at all, or to speak only under mental and social duress, have views I disagree with; others have views I agree with; still others have views that I have not made up my mind about. Regarding the last, it is not clear that I am going to have a chance to make up my mind for it is not clear whether the speakers involved are going to feel that the personal costs of public statements are worth the gains in educating me and others.

These problems have not been unique to my university and their emergence has been frequently deplored. I am not here interested in adding any rhetorical flourishes to this discussion: the matter is too important for either declamation or recrimination. I do wish to dispute, however, the view that because the organized New Left has lost stature and influence of late, the problem has ceased to exist. The tumult has subsided a bit (though, as I write, the President's office at Harvard is occupied by demonstrators and the Center for International Affairs has recently been sacked) and a mood of "business as usual" is now displayed by most faculty and students. But a decline in tumult and a return to self-interest are hardly equivalent to a reaffirmation of liberal values, or of any other values for that matter. The legacy of the campus flirtation with authoritarian politics is still very much with us, not in the continuance of militant action but in the absence of democratic convictions. The New Left may have repudiated itself by its extremism but it also weakened the institution that gave birth to it by casting doubt on the legitimacy of the university and of the principles of free discussion that support it.

My thesis is that the atmosphere that nurtures certain kinds of illiberality is in part a product of liberal education itself. This is *not* to say that a liberal education teaches disdain for civil liberties or tolerance for violence; quite the contrary. Nor is it to say that only a liberal education contributes to this attitude; certain persons by family origin and the political socialization it provides are more likely to display both liberality and illiberality than others. It *is* to say that among the consequences of a liberal education is a set of sympathies which lead many, though not all, persons in a university to acquiesce in the uncivil acts of a small minority.

It is time I offered some definitions. By "liberalism" I mean a loose set of values that emphasizes the protection of civil liberties, the support of equal political and economic opportunity, the melioration of the lot of the disadvantaged, and the enhancement of the area of personal self-expression. Liberalism, thus defined, is a tendency that both liberalizes and liberates; that is, it calls both for generosity and openhandedness in the treatment of others and for a minimum of restraint or bondage on the actions of one's self. The modern father of liberalism remains John Stuart Mill: as he explained it, the polity should be organized both to insure the liberty of the citizens and the liberality of the government; the social principle should be the greatest good of the greatest number and the legal principle should be the greatest freedom of an individual consistent with the freedom of others.

A "liberal education" is thought to mean schooling in subjects that broaden one's cultural and historical sensibilities and strengthen one's critical faculties. The purpose of a liberal education is to induct a student, however partially and briefly, into the world of the intellectual. That world, in turn, is one which places a high value on the exercise of criticism, the display of originality, and the understanding of what is unfamiliar, ancient, distant, and problematic. The application of critical faculties to political and social practices means displaying suspicion toward what is formally and conventionally thought to be true in favor of what the initiated believe is actually and informally true, challenging beliefs about the purposes and legitimacy of institutions, and comparing existing practices with real or imagined alternatives. The critical thrust of liberal-arts education is invariably directed against the "conventional wisdom," and as new conventions succeed old ones, the process of criticism is repeated *ad infinitum*. The object is to acquire new and esoteric knowledge to replace popular or conventional opinion. The criteria for what constitutes "knowledge" are often not clear, being sometimes the outcome of the "scientific method" and sometimes merely the ability to be original, daring, or shocking. For example, the critical faculties when applied to

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American government would emphasize not constitutions but "power structures," not public opinion but the social determinants of opinion, not official statements and legal enactments but bureaucratic empire-building and legislative special interests.

The other part of the world of the intellectual is that which enlarges the perceived range of conduct, thought, and opinion by the sympathetic portrayal of what is remote, forgotten, unusual, deprived, obscure, or precarious. This aspect of the intellectual world stresses the development, not of criticism, but of cosmopolitanism. The variety of aesthetic, political, and cultural experiences is portrayed and, by being portrayed in neutral or even sympathetic tones, that variety is made to seem, if not desirable, then at least legitimate. This aspect of liberal education is directed not so much against conventional opinion as against conventional morality, which is to say, against bourgeois morality. We learn from this experience to know and appreciate the secret worlds and despised habits of those persons who, before we began our liberal education, were beyond our ken or unpalatable to our taste. For example, we are led to read sympathetically the works of authors and poets who have stood outside the main cultural stream; we are informed of the life and plight of those who have been disadvantaged in the prevailing distribution of political or economic resources; and we encounter the different life styles of other tribes, cultures, and epochs.

Now there is obviously a close relationship between liberalism and liberal education. The exercise of the critical spirit requires the maintenance of political and intellectual freedom. An interest in deprived or despised groups leads to a concern for them, and this in turn tends to imply public and political generosity toward them. It is no surprise that liberal-arts students and professors should become liberals.

How, then, can a liberal education ever be the adversary of liberalism? The answer, I think, is that while the critical faculty requires the existence of civil liberties, it also erodes the bases of authority and legitimacy of those institutions that define and defend those liberties. Criticism is relentless and accepts no bounds; it may prosper when discourse is free and unconstrained but the price paid for that intellectual prosperity is the unceasing assault on those political and legal practices that have produced such freedom. And in the case of Herbert Marcuse, the critical faculty even comes to doubt the value of the freedom itself. Freedom exists because there first existed a certain kind of social order maintained and defined by laws, governments, and authority. Freedom cannot exist outside some system of order, yet no system of order is immune from intellectual assault.

Intellectual criticism would have bounds if there were a widely-accepted principle of authority or theory of human nature on which certain political institutions could rest immune from eroding questions. At various times there have been. Jefferson believed, or wrote as if he believed, that political and civil liberty were among the natural rights of men. But the concept of "natural rights," I need hardly add, has been among the first principles to be criticized, for it implies by its use of the term "natural" that something exists beyond man's invention and thus beyond man's revision. Reinhold Niebuhr offered a different defense of democracy: man's nature is good enough to make it possible but bad enough to make it necessary. Stated differently, we grant civil liberty because we cannot trust anyone to decide the truth. But that notion is no better suited to resist the critical impulse; it also is based on a theory of human nature and thus implies that there are aspects to our lives that are beyond the capacity of society to understand or to alter. Finally, there is the theory of consent: we have freedoms because we have agreed to have them. But if we have agreed to have freedom, we might also agree not to have freedom. Consent is a weak theory of legitimacy, and intellectuals sense it: their own privileges, if granted simply by democratic vote, could be revoked by democratic vote, and from time to time the society has been inclined to do just that.

When one presses an intellectual to supply a defense of liberty, he tends to give some variant of a single argument: utility. Liberty is good because it is useful: it enables society to discover the truth or to find, by discussion, the best policies or the wisest leaders. Under ordinary circumstances, that defense is probably good enough: liberty is useful, or at least more useful than the alternatives. But in extraordinary times, such as the present, the argument is not decisive. Persons who feel strongly that an injustice should be corrected or a condition alleviated are likely to be impatient with, and even actively hostile toward, those who wish to say that the injustice does not exist or the social problem is the fault, not of society, but of those who display the symptoms. Efforts will be made to silence such persons. The majority will not participate in such efforts, but if they believe the doctrine being silenced is sufficiently odious, they will take no active steps to oppose the censorship. They will be all the more reluctant to oppose it if it is being imposed by members of the community they value and on whose esteem they substantially depend.

It is here that the cosmopolitan aspect of liberal education becomes important. When one has cultivated an especially keen regard for the plight of some group, one is especially reluctant to continue a critical discussion of the merits of the case. The commitment to the object of con-

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cern ought to be expressed. The ways in which that priority is stated are familiar enough: "Following rules ought not to interfere with doing what is right," or "It is wrong to prefer form over substance."

Let me state in more grandiose terms what I am suggesting. Liberalism, at least as it is conveyed by higher education, is less a theory of justice than a theory of benevolence. By "justice" I mean, roughly, treating equals equally and by rules known in advance and applicable to all. By "benevolence" I mean a disposition to treat someone in a generous way, to serve his or her perceived interests and desires. Liberalism imparts a commitment to certain rules and practices that are very much a part of a theory of justice—the rule of law, equality of opportunity, democratic voting—but these rules and practices, being abstract and justified on grounds of utility, cannot easily or for long withstand an aroused sense of benevolence. Benevolence, after all, is motivated by sentiments of compassion and a belief in the worthiness of some person or group. A natural, or at least easily-stimulated, sentiment will usually be more powerful than a belief in a rule or practice.

It is sometimes suggested that students are "idealists" and that it is this that explains much of their political behavior. If the view I have developed here is correct, the word "idealist" is not the proper one, for it implies a conception of an ideal world, or the existence of an ideology, or an attachment to the importance of ideas. None of these connotations has been, in my experience, descriptive of the behavior being explained. A more accurate account would stress the fact that students, and young persons generally, have a larger and more active sense of compassion and a more easily aroused instinct of benevolence. The emotions of the young lie close to the surface; they are quickly stimulated and highly volatile. The current style that favors "coolness" should not blind us to this fact. The best evidence for it is found in the personal relationships that characterize the young: sudden attachments, romantic love, a concern for "sincerity" and openness. The communal tendencies of students have been far more visible and will probably be far more enduring than their ideological ones.

What a liberal education does is to provide a new or enlarged range of objects for those sentiments: the poor, the black, the ancient, the aesthetic, the distant, the natural. And a liberal education supplies a set of reasons for the neglect or disadvantage which these favored objects must bear. That reason is, in its most general version, the callousness of spirit, selfishness of interest, and the smallness of mind of society, its governing institutions, and, above all, its dominant class. At least in the modern period, a liberal education has tended, with varying degrees of success, to challenge the values of prevailing society and to set students apart from it. What Lionel Trilling has found to be true of modern literature is true of modern education generally:

> Any historian of the literature of the modern age will take virtually for granted the adversary intention, the actual subversive intention, that characterizes modern writing—he will perceive its clear purpose of detaching the reader from the habits of thought and feeling that the larger culture imposes, of giving him a ground and a vantage point from which to judge and condemn, and perhaps revise, the culture that has produced him.

In its extreme form, the concern with authenticity as opposed to conventionality leads to a preoccupation with pure emotion, the unconscious, and even the occult and supernatural. "Authenticity," to quote Trilling again, is an object of almost obsessive concern both "as a quality of the personal life and as a criterion of art." In its extreme form, this concern may be new, but at root it is as old as man. It once was called "sincerity" or "passion," and it has always characterized the social world of the young. Today, the young are no longer simply a biological category, they are virtually a social class, at least insofar as they are college students, and thus their concerns have become ours.

The personal concern for sincerity, feeling, and authenticity becomes, when displaced onto society, a concern for benevolence and compassion. That this displacement should occur in the way it does is a consequence of modernity; that is, it is a consequence of the fact that we now live in a secular society. Religion and God once served as objects for passion; to a limited degree, they may be returning; but in general only society can today supply the extra-personal object for passion and benevolence. The decline of religion as a focus for emotion has been underway for decades, but it became dramatically evident in the early years of the last decade. During the 1950's, theology emphasized the depravity, corruption, and imperfection of human nature and the consequent need for social restraint and legal authority as a way of preventing political and social fanaticism. But by the 1960's, as Daniel Bell has noted, an astonishing reversal had occurred: God was dead, society rather than man was the problem, social restraint was insufferable, and activism was the only form of purity. Barth, Tillich, and Niebuhr were replaced by Altizer, Vahanian, and Cox. A secular theology became a fervent ally of political liberalism.

Thus, almost the only source of ultimate value that could maintain a sense of justice against the rush of benevolence gave way. The delicate balance that must be maintained between form and substance, between rule and action, was seriously disturbed. Liberating oneself, and aiding in the liberation of deserving others, became the single

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end. How this was done was less important than the fact that it was done.

But benevolence can never be the sole principle of human action. At a superficial level, benevolence often tends to be perceived by its objects as busybodyness, even paternalism. At a more profound level, benevolence risks rejection or failure: what if those aided do not improve, or if for some reason personal efforts are not followed by institutional commitments? Benevolence, when frustrated, often turns to rage and those who once celebrated the virtues of compassion may come to indulge sentiments of hatred.

In 1962, an organization of students produced a document that read in part as follows:

> We regard *men* as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love. . . . Men have unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity. . . . The goals of men and society should be human independence: a concern with . . . finding a meaning of life that is personally authentic, . . . one which has full, spontaneous access to present and past experiences. *Human relationships* should involve fraternity and honesty.

Within a few years, this organization, including many of those who signed this statement at Port Huron, were attacking universities, harassing those who disagreed with them, demanding political obedience, and engaging in deliberate terrorism. Nothing could have been more liberal than the 1962 statement of the SDS; nothing could have been less liberal than its subsequent history.

For most of us, choices are never this stark. There is a sense of balance that almost always asserts itself so that neither the stern and unyielding principles of justice nor the heedless sense of compassion dominates our actions. A liberal education is at its best when it strikes this balance: when it makes one aware that principles must ultimately be justified by something more than mere utility, that liberty is as worth preserving when it is attacked by a group one admires as it is when assaulted by a group one detests, and that the bonds of civility upon which the maintenance of society depends are more fragile than we often admit.

When properly conducted, there is an inevitable and desirable tension in a liberal education: developing only the critical faculties produces universal skepticism, even about those new worlds of the mind that are discovered in a college, while heightening one's sensibilities and enlarging one's powers of compassion tend to suppress the exercise of criticism. Among the best students and teachers, that tension is evident: they are educated up to that delicate point where they can be neither true believers nor utter skeptics.

And so it should be with liberalism, or indeed with any other political faith. The commitment to fair rules and procedures often inhibits the solution of certain problems, just as the commitment to social action can subvert the maintenance of those rules. Living with such partially incompatible goals requires, ultimately, the preservation within oneself of a realm of inner privacy into which neither politics nor society can reach and where quietude and imagination do gentle battle for the loyalty of our spirit.

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Judaism after Auschwitz

The Religious Thought of Emil L. Fackenheim

Michael A. Meyer

ONLY in the last five years have Emil Fackenheim's writings become known to more than a small group of interested Jewish theologians. Articles on individual themes had appeared, especially in COMMENTARY and *Judaism*, since the late 40's, but the lack of a single collected volume made any integrated study of his work difficult. He was overshadowed by such established and prolific writers as Mordecai Kaplan and Abraham Heschel, and for a time by even such a relative outsider as Will Herberg, who had formulated his ideas within the covers of a book and set out to propagate them with public lectures. Then, too, American Jewry in the postwar period was occupied with discovering the European-Jewish thinkers, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, and, indeed, Fackenheim himself contributed much to the transplantation of their ideas.

Yet in the years after his escape from Nazi Germany to Canada, Fackenheim successfully created an essential prerequisite for his work as a Jewish thinker: he established his credentials as a professional philosopher. His first writings, dealing with medieval Arabic scholasticism, drew him into contact as well with its Greek sources and with the medieval Jewish philosophy it influenced. At the same time, he pursued an abiding interest in German idealism that produced successive studies of Schelling, Kant, and Hegel. This wide-ranging philosophical competence, combined with the rabbinical education he received during the last days of the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Berlin, has lent Fackenheim an authority enjoyed by few contemporary Jewish theologians.

With the recent appearance of three volumes of his work and the reissue of two of them in paperback form,* Fackenheim's thought is now attracting the wider attention it has long deserved. No doubt it is also the emphatic insistence Fackenheim has lately placed on the relevance of the Holocaust for Jewish theology which has carried interest in his work beyond the circle of theologians to the larger group of Jews—and Christians—trying to confront what may well be the most shattering event of our time. Yet in endeavoring to comprehend Fackenheim's Jewish thought as a whole, it would be an error, I think, to begin with the significance of Auschwitz. The point of departure must rather be with responses to the much earlier challenge of modern secular thought: those which Fackenheim criticizes as well as his own. Only once the Holocaust is seen in the perspective of Fackenheim's thinking in all of its aspects does its crucial place in his theology become apparent.

I

FACKENHEIM first appears in the 50's as a severe critic of the prevalent tendencies in liberal Jewish thought. With equal vigor he attacks the religious idealism taken into Judaism by the 19th-century German-Jewish liberals and transferred to America by Reform theologians such as Kaufmann Kohler, and the religious naturalism (or as he prefers, immanentism) indigenous to America and introduced into Judaism by Mordecai Kaplan.

The first of these, religious idealism, was a theological position most congenial to the political and cultural context in which it first entered Jewish thought. Its assertion that the essential content of Judaism was universal ethical monotheism relieved it of the scandal of particularity; its generality effectively removed the necessity of applying moral imperatives to the specific social problems of German society. Since idealism dominated German philosophy through much of the 19th century, it could also appear as the eminently modern interpretation of Judaism. Internally as well, idealism had distinct advantages. It offered a *raison d'être* for continued Jewish existence as long as other religions did not yet share Judaism's purified conception of God and as long as messianic morality had not yet been established on

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* *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Indiana University Press, 1967; Beacon Paperback, 1970); *Quest for Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Theology* (Indiana University Press, 1968; Beacon Paperback, 1970); *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (New York University Press, 1970).

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earth. Moreover, in its Kantian form, the generalized moral imperative could be linked with the traditional notion of Divine command, thus providing a modicum of continuity with the Jewish past. Finally, by positing an essence of Judaism, idealism was able to deal with the increasingly bothersome problem of biblical criticism. Sinaitic revelation could be sifted according to its approximation of the religious ideal progressively manifest to all mankind, but especially through the special "genius" of the Jewish people.

Fackenheim consistently and radically rejects all forms of Jewish idealism and essentialism. In each of them he finds that the *concept* of God has come to replace the *existing* God, the former unable to act except through the consciences of men. The modern Jew himself becomes the final arbiter over the character and divinity of Jewish tradition. Jewish sources are transformed from documents of revelation into "great books," important steps in the development of the human spirit. They become products of the religious history of the people, but no longer records of divine-human encounter which can speak directly to the present. Abraham and Moses must appear as men of primitive religious conceptions compared to their latter-day descendants. In addition, such a progressive view of religious belief leads to a cultural optimism and a conception of moral progress which, Fackenheim argues, may have been appropriate to the early 19th century, but hardly fit the realities of the 20th.

In America Fackenheim discovered two newer tendencies which had found Jewish exponents: psychological utilitarianism and religious naturalism. The first of these was, and still is, a widespread phenomenon, seldom adopted by serious writers, but prevalent in popular works. Its exponents stress the social and psychological usefulness of Judaism and, as Fackenheim says, make it into "a wholesome pill rather than the opiate of the people." But for Fackenheim faith can never be a means to any external end, least of all the soothing of anxieties.

The second tendency, represented by Reconstructionism, presents the graver challenge as it claims a theological foundation. Fackenheim, following Eliezer Berkovits, has been at pains to point out that Reconstructionist theology is not in fact merely a religious extension of naturalism. Its commitment to moral values renders it discontinuous with the natural order; its faith in a Power making for salvation puts it beyond the sphere of scientific verifiability. Were it not for such a faith, nature would remain barren of human values and aspirations. Yet to believe God is completely manifest within a single order of reality requires either radically diminishing the concept of God's power or assuming, in the teeth of contemporary history, that the world is nearing the point of redemption. For Fackenheim, Reconstructionist naturalism is thus in actuality a form of immanentist faith which projects human values upon the cosmos. It does not allow for a God who exists independently of man, transcends history and nature though He reveals Himself in them, and is, insofar as man can know Him, totally personal. Yet it is the avowed purpose of Fackenheim's thought to uphold each one of these tenets. His starting point is the incommensurability of the two orders, human and divine.

Though over the years some of his emphases have changed, Fackenheim has been from the first and still is today a religious existentialist. In his earliest writings the influence of Kierkegaard is readily apparent and freely acknowledged. Toward the beginning of one of his first essays* (not included in the recent collection) Fackenheim wrote:

> No modern man, then, can start his theology with God and God's revelation, and work his way down to man. The procedure must be the reverse: we must start with man and see whether there is not something in his existence leading up to God—in other words, whether a profound enough self-understanding does not lead to the point where one must make the leap into faith.

Human existence without God is tragic; with God it is at least partially redeemed. Man the finite creature stands in need of a supernatural God whom he can reach only when he takes the risk of faith. Suspending the decision is not possible; one must choose either the leap into faith or the contradictoriness of human existence without it. The agnostic, too, makes an existential decision if not an intellectual one: he chooses to live his life without the redeeming presence of God. Intellectually, he may decide to remain a "spectator" rather than commit himself to theism or atheism, but he is unable to suspend his own existence. And as long as he persists in his attitude as spectator, he eliminates all possibility of discovering God. For God reveals Himself only to the man who listens, waiting to hear.

WHILE remaining a supernaturalist, Fackenheim in the course of time retreated from this stark polarizing of the two orders and the need to leap from the secularist stance into faith. He came to see that confidence and despair can exist both within faith and outside of it and that the theologian cannot legitimately force commitment upon the secularist. Increasingly, he occupied himself rather with the relationship between faith and reason and in his work on Hegel critically analyzed the grandest endeavor of all to build a philosophical bridge between them. At the same time, his thought moved more into the orbit of the specifically Jewish. To be sure, from the beginning he quoted Jewish sources, biblical and rabbinic, as illustra-

* "The Modern Jew's Path to God," COMMENTARY, May 1950.

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tions for his theses. In fact he made his readers aware of how one-sided was the prevalent tendency to choose only optimistic dicta from Jewish tradition, those which supported the conception of moral progress, and to neglect sources which expressed a contradictory view. But his existentialist analysis of faith, taken as it was from a non-Jewish source, stressed that the act of faith corresponds to perennial human problems and that it has its origins in the tragedy of the finite human condition. Even Abraham appeared as "the awe-inspiring representative of an existence not essentially different from the existence in which all men live." But as he ceased to make a polemical argument for faith and began to discuss its character and dynamics, Fackenheim's thought took a more particularist turn and the influence of Martin Buber, present from the beginning, became dominant.

II

In speaking of faith within a Jewish context, Fackenheim had to combat the prevalent doctrine that theology, however conceived, was not indigenous to Judaism. Jewish scholarship and practice of the *halakhah* were both regarded as legitimate forms of Jewish expression, but speaking of God's relation to man or to the Jewish people was not. Perhaps the unsettling character of such issues made it preferable then—and still today—to dispose of them lightly, as essentially peripheral to Judaism. Those strictures, however, which were directed against the theological enterprise for insufficient attention to the particular character of Judaism had to be seriously considered. It thus became apparent to Fackenheim that any specifically Jewish theology would have to be anchored in the sources of Jewish tradition understood as the reflection of a unique relationship between God and Israel, not merely as examples of a universal religious response to the human condition. As a Jewish thinker, he therefore had to develop a doctrine of revelation which was mediated through the Bible and succeeding rabbinic literature, even while as a liberal Jew he could allow the sources to possess authority only insofar as they still conveyed God's act and word to the present.

Fackenheim has as consistently rejected all modern efforts to reduce revelation to human inspiration as he has those which reduct the supernatural God to a God-idea or to a Force contained within nature. Revelation, in his view, is nothing less than God's descent into time, the incursion of the supernatural into the natural, of eternity into a present moment. In the biblical account it took the form of "a succession of overwhelming religious experiences." Though at first Fackenheim held that asserting the actuality of such a specific revelation required a leap no less radical than that he had claimed necessary for belief in God, it was just here that his thought led most apparently from the language of Kierkegaard to that of Buber. The latter's understanding of revelation, both biblical and present-day, came to form a central and permanent element of Fackenheim's thought.

Belief in biblical revelation, Fackenheim came to hold, depends upon whether revelation is also available to the individual. The modern Jew will not declare the truth of God's incursion into the human realm at some time past unless he himself encounters His presence. Not being an Orthodox Jew, and like Buber unable to accept the records of revelation except as they speak fragmentarily to the modern Jew himself, Fackenheim had to begin with Buber's concept of the I-Thou by which God's presence manifests itself potentially to everyone and not alone to those who stood at Sinai. Buber's division of all knowing into the scientific mode which reduces every Thou to an It and the religious mode through which God—the eternal Thou who can never become an It, an object—can alone be encountered, furnishes Fackenheim, as it does Buber, with a formidable defense against subjective reductionism. Dialogues with God appear as merely disguised monologues only when they are examined with the tools of I-It. But God, reduced to an It, is no longer God, merely a God-hypothesis. Revelation thus exists in a separate metaphysical realm accessible only to the kind of listening which rules out philosophical, psychological, or any other kind of analysis. The former requires commitment, the latter detachment.

Fackenheim does not avoid asking two obvious questions: what of the man who seeks to achieve revelation but doesn't succeed, and what of the possibility that the supposed revelation of an Other turns out to be no more than an illusion, as the subjectivist claims? In dealing with the first question, Fackenheim again borrows a term from Buber: "the eclipse of God." God may, as the Psalmist put it, "hide His face." The failure to relate to God does not prove His nonexistence, but only either that the attempt was not genuine or that He does not choose to reveal His presence. Whether God will manifest Himself to a particular individual or withhold Himself even from an entire age must, of course, be God's decision, not man's. Man is therefore left not knowing whether to regard the absence of God he experiences as an eclipse of God's presence or as the final exposure of an illusion. Only if at some time he has received an intimation of God's presence can he believe that its rarity and the failure of his fellows to testify to it forces only the admission of God's concealment, not His non-existence. The second question is no less grave in its consequences. False prophets, too, have been sincere, and the actions their words have prompted have all too often been devastating for mankind. The religious believer, who is convinced that God re-

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vealed His presence to him, takes the risk that his experience was illusory, that it revealed only an interior projection in the form of a false god outside himself. Fackenheim does argue that here tradition may be a guide, at least negatively with respect to the rejection of false content. But the reality of God's presence for the individual cannot be validated from any source outside the sphere of faith. Certainty is contained in the relationship itself, which remains impervious to detached analysis.

Once the I-Thou relationship with God has become a fact of the individual's own life, he may presume its existence for biblical man as well. But it still remains to appropriate the biblical revelation and make it one's own. For it is the specific *content* of that revelation, not God's presence alone (which must be taken as universal) that constitutes its continuing relevance. Somehow the modern Jew must be able to relive the religious experience of his ancestors. This is possible, according to Fackenheim, when the documents recording that experience are approached neither as the literal and fixed word of God nor as mere human inspiration, but as the human record of divine encounter through which revelation of another time may be actively appropriated for the present. Yet how is this to be done?

The liberal Jew reading the Bible has not decided in advance that it is the literal word of God. Quite to the contrary, the text of the Torah is the human reflection of a divine revelation, but it is not itself divine. It is no more than a *response* to God's incursion into history. Hence the words themselves possess no authority; their significance is limited by the understanding of finite men. Yet God speaks to the present through the Torah when it is read with the question: What content does the biblical response to revelation transmit to me, though I may formulate it differently for myself? Necessary above all is openness, willingness to listen to the testimony of the text. Thus the commandments regarding animal sacrifices may be understood as a time-bound response to God's commandment of faithfulness to the covenant. But that faithfulness, though variously to be expressed, is as binding upon the modern Jew as it was upon his forefathers. To Fackenheim, as to a circle of like-minded theologians, the concept of covenant asserts the truth of a supernatural and specific revelation which commits Israel to God, without elaborating what that revelation must mean in terms of individual commandments. Through encounter with the biblical text the modern Jew relives the experience of Sinai, but he comes away from it with different words. And yet the modern content, though individually appropriated, is not so far removed from the traditional commandments. Following Franz Rosenzweig, Fackenheim holds that those laws which can become commandments personally addressed to the individual are as binding upon the liberal Jew as they are on the traditionalist. He does not merely "select" from the past what seems meaningful or valid by some external criterion accepted prior to confronting the sources, let alone by what appears convenient. His selection appears as such only after it is done. The process itself occurs within the I-Thou confrontation with God *via* the text. It is thus God's doing as much as his own. Whoever approaches the text in this fashion risks being radically changed by the encounter.

III

WHILE Fackenheim has not been alone in struggling to define the possibility and the authority of revelation, he has been unique among American-Jewish thinkers in realizing the significance which modern man's historical outlook has for religious faith. Ever since 19th-century thought seriously called into question the permanence of human nature, man has been understood as a being who constitutes himself by his own actions. The consequences of this notion for philosophy and religion have been considerable. Once the historicity of man's being is acknowledged, it has been argued, there can be no timeless truths which exist beyond history. Metaphysics may lay claim to permanence, but in fact it represents only a historically determined understanding of reality. Metaphysical systems become no more than a sequence of historically relative *Weltanschauungen*. The effect on religion is equally devastating. Like metaphysics, revelation lays claim to permanent truth existing in a realm beyond history. If the individual is totally circumscribed by his position in time, revelation can only be interpreted as a temporally limited understanding, not an absolute one. He may ascribe divinity to the historical process or the symbol of particular values which men have discovered, but he cannot claim the perception of permanent truth. For the historicist, to whom the historicity of all truth has become unshakable dogma, historical reductionism performs the same role that subjective reductionism does for the empiricist.

It would not be too much to say that the most fundamental theme in Fackenheim's thought taken as a whole, whether general or Jewish, is his many-sided endeavor to argue for the validity of trans-historical truth. In his philosophy as in his theology, Fackenheim has sought to assert the reality of a realm of permanence above the flux of time and the finitude of human existence. He well realizes that historical change cannot be ignored and that it must be taken most seriously with regard to Judaism. But he has consistently held, against the dominant view in philosophical circles, that metaphysics is not merely a sequence of world-views expressive of the ages which produced them; and against most liberal Jews that

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Jewish theology is not a progression of God-concepts advancing from the primitive to the more sublime.

This recognition of the implications of historicity for philosophy and religion was bound to lead Fackenheim sooner or later to a confrontation with Hegel. No philosopher before Hegel had been so conscious of the naturally and historically situated character of human existence. Yet none asserted as emphatically that in art, religion, and above all in philosophy man is capable of transcending his situation. Like other existentialists before him, Fackenheim was forced to deal with the Hegelian system as the grandest attempt to encompass religion within the bounds of a historically conscious philosophy. He came to regard Hegel as "the greatest modern religious philosopher," though in the end he finds his philosophy unacceptable for the very reason that it is too much tied to one particular period of history.

Because he is at odds with the tendency of most modern philosophers to limit severely the scope of their discipline, Fackenheim's approach to Hegel is far more sympathetic than most. Like Hegel, he too has been tempted by the desire to arrive at a systematic body of thought which could encompass, in dialectical unity, idea and actual world, transcendence and immanence, revelation and freedom. For both, the task of philosophy must be more ambitious than the mere analysis of language or the clarification of concepts. It extends to the search for unity, purpose, and direction. Fackenheim addresses himself particularly to the place of religion within Hegel's philosophical system. Does religion, which for Hegel reaches its highest stage in Protestant Christianity, in the end lose its distinctiveness in the perspective of philosophy? He argues that it does not. Philosophy adopts the content of religion, supplying it only with a new form. In a masterful effort Hegel's philosophy "makes peace with religion" by preserving the reality of the divine-human relationship while at the same time overreaching religious life and encompassing it in transfigured philosophical form.

Fackenheim's critique of Hegel is therefore not, for the most part, an internal one. His ultimate rejection of Hegelianism is based less on philosophical grounds than it is on the significance of subsequent history. While it may be false that Hegel regarded the Prussian state as the embodiment of the absolute philosophy, let alone that his system can be associated with totalitarianism, he did possess a remarkable confidence in reason and in modern man's constructive use of his freedom. Events since his time have severely undermined that confidence. Recent history has given such striking evidence of the incommensurability of the order of God with that of man as to tear asunder Hegel's peace between faith and philosophy. "Indeed, such are the crises which have befallen the Christian West in the last half century," writes Fackenheim, "that it may safely be said that, were he alive today, so realistic a philosopher as Hegel would not be a Hegelian." Fackenheim, the opponent of all historicism, thus disposes of Hegel on grounds which, if not historicist, at least amount to a form of historical reductionism: Hegel's philosophy was adequate, but only for its own age.

This turn in Fackenheim's thought toward an even greater awareness of the consequences of history for philosophy and religion must be connected with a shift in his specifically Jewish thought occurring at the time he was writing his book on Hegel. To be sure, as a Jew, Fackenheim had all along been unable to accept Hegel's consignment of Judaism to a one-sidedly transcendent stage in the history of religions. But it was not until the mid-60's, and due largely to the personal influence of Elie Wiesel, that Fackenheim first became aware, as a Jew, of the radical consequences which the Nazi Holocaust must have for any philosophical system, and especially for Hegel's. Concluding a recent essay dealing with Hegel's famous assertion that "what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational,"* Fackenheim clearly expressed the notion that such an equation between thought and historical reality in today's world has become a moral impossibility. Abstract philosophy simply cannot encompass the Holocaust:

> Can the historical conditions producing the actuality of the rational (and hence the rationality of the actual) pass away? The religious incursion into the world of God in Christ may or may not leave room for subsequent eruptions of demonic evil in the world which produce genocidal industries with by-products including human skin made into lamp-shades, human hair used for pillows, human bones turned into fertilizer. Hegel's actuality of the rational leaves room only for world-historically insignificant evils to be disposed of as relapses into tribalism or barbarism. In their post-Enlightenment optimism all but a few modern philosphers have ignored or denied the demonic. Hegel's philosophy—which unites Christian religious with modern secular optimism—is the most radical and hence most serious expression of this modern tendency. . . . Any inquiry into its truth must confront its claims with the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

IV

Until the mid-60's, the Holocaust possessed no special significance for Fackenheim's religious thought. It served merely as an illustration of the manifestation of evil in our time and was used to strike at optimistic theologies. No religious meaning was contained in it. Nor did Fackenheim relate it in any fashion to Jewish survival. The secular Jew who regarded continuing Jewish existence as a duty, he then

* *The Review of Metaphysics*, June 1970.

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held, either persisted in something unintelligible or else postulated, however unconsciously, the possibility of a return to faith in a living God.

Even today Fackenheim is convinced that Auschwitz allows of no theological explanation, certainly not as punishment for sin. But he can view it no longer as simply another instance of man's continuing propensity for evil. If taken seriously, it is an event which threatens to shatter the traditional Jewish understanding of God if not to signify His death for the modern believer.

In *God's Presence in History,* Fackenheim has developed the related concepts of "root experiences" and "epoch-making events." The former are, for example, the salvation at the Red Sea and the commandments of Sinai; the latter, for example, the destruction of the first and second Temples, the Emancipation, the Holocaust, and the State of Israel. Root experiences were those revelations of God's presence to Israel which first constituted it as a people. They were public historical events which legislate to the present because they remain accessible through allowing of reenactment as present reality. They may be essentially manifestations of saving Presence or of commanding Presence, though commandment is not entirely absent in either. Epoch-making events, in contrast, do not produce a new faith; they make a new claim upon the existing faith as that faith is tested by contemporary experience. In the modern period the Emancipation produced the ongoing challenge of secularism and required a rethinking of Jewish faith. It struck at the root experiences via biblical criticism and empiricist philosophy. As we have seen, Fackenheim himself responded to that challenge with Buber's doctrine of encounter. But the challenge of the Holocaust is considerably more severe. It represents an epoch-making event in Jewish history which strikes directly at God's relation to history and hence at the presence of God without which there could have been no root experiences and hence no Jewish faith. The Midrash, which Fackenheim regards as "the greatest theology ever produced within Judaism," does indeed concern itself with the dialectical contradiction inherent in God's involvement with history and the evil which exists within it. But can Auschwitz be incorporated into a Midrashic framework that, while allowing contradictions to remain presently unresolved, nonetheless depends upon faith in their ultimate resolution? Or does it finally burst that framework and cause a turning away from the God of history?

Fackenheim even sharpens the difficulty of assimilating the Holocaust by stressing its uniqueness. Never before was the Jew singled out for destruction according to racial criteria which made fateful his great-grandparents' decision to remain Jewish and not his own. As a historical event it remains qualitatively different from the Belgians' murdering millions of Congolese and from the Turkish massacre of the Armenians. These other genocides were individually and collectively no less tragic, yet in each case there was some rational purpose, economic or political. But Auschwitz represents the sole example of "evil for evil's sake," the eruption of a demonic evil which contravened rational self-interest. Trains needed for the German war effort were diverted to bring Jewish victims to the death camps; murdering Jews became not the means to an end but an end in itself.

For the believing Jew Auschwitz, seriously considered, must therefore present the severest test of his faith. The eclipse of God appears so complete in the present that all comprehension of His presence to Israel in the past and all hope for it in the future seem to be cut off as well: "If *all present* access to the God of history is *wholly* lost, the God of history is Himself lost." The only possible course would be declaring either God's radical powerlessness and hence actual death or that God Himself relates to the Jewish people in a fashion wholly unreconcilable with the moral commandments He has revealed. Theism for a Jew would seem no longer possible—unless in some unprecedented fashion God Himself were speaking to His people out of the midst of the slaughter. It is the most striking, radical, and original element in all of Fackenheim's thought that he has affirmed this possibility. There emerges a revelation addressed to all Jews: "The Jewish secularist, no less than the believer, is absolutely *singled out* by a Voice as truly other than man-made ideals—an imperative as truly given—as was the Voice of Sinai."

The imperative is to hand Hitler no posthumous victories. It is a positive command to survive as a people and to remember the victims. It is a prohibition against despair of man and his world, lest the world be handed over to the forces of Auschwitz; a prohibition as well against despair of the God of Israel, lest Hitler have succeeded in destroying the Jewish faith. The voice is real; it has been heard by secular and believing Jew alike, accepted absolutely and with holy resolve. Especially has this been true for the Jews of Israel whenever they were threatened by a second Holocaust, whether in the War of Liberation or in May and June of 1967.

Because the Voice of Auschwitz possesses commanding power it most resembles the Voice of Sinai. Yet to biblical Israel God was present also at the Red Sea, where He appeared not to command but to save. If the Voice of Auschwitz can be likened to the Voice of Sinai, can 1948 or 1967 be likened to the parting of the Red Sea? And if not, can the Jew after Auschwitz celebrate the Passover? Unlike some other Jewish theologians, Fackenheim has been most hesitant to discern God's hand in the victory of Israel's army. If there was "abiding astonishment" at the sudden salva-

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tion in June 1967, it was because the Voice of Auschwitz was heard. "Solely because of the connection of the events of May and June with Auschwitz did a military victory (rarely applauded in Judaism and never for its own sake) acquire an inescapable religious dimension." Nowhere does Fackenheim say explicitly that the Six-Day War was an incursion of God's saving presence. Celebrating the Passover is thus made no easier by the saving events of our time. If nonetheless there is reason for hope, it can only be because of the commandment to hope, and that emerged out of the tragedy, not from the victory of arms.

Even as consciousness of the Holocaust brings together secular and religious Jew in common concern, so it may come close to severing the bond with Christianity. Fackenheim does not hold Christianity responsible for Auschwitz, but he does argue that Christian teaching was a contributing factor, even if Nazism be defined as anti-Christian. What has been most shocking is the failure of most Christians to accept that fact even today. In May 1967 the Christian community "failed to recognize the danger of a second Holocaust because it has yet to recognize the fact of the first." And yet, so Fackenheim holds, to allow the gulf between Jew and Christian to widen is also to hand Hitler a posthumous victory. It was the Nazis, after all, who succeeded so well in splitting Christians off from Jews and making them oblivious to any concern for Jews as human beings. Only insofar as the Christian can join the Jew in a common effort to prevent future Holocausts can the long-standing rift, widened by Hitler and not yet closed, at length be bridged.

Finally, Auschwitz has also made the Jew shudder at certain forms of secularism and Christian atheism. Remembering the Holocaust, he cannot wholeheartedly celebrate the freedom of man in his secular city; he remains personally too aware of man's potentiality for evil. Even less can he believe with Christian atheism that God is fully immanent in the world and that therefore prophetic wrath is wholly misplaced. Out of his first-hand experience with Nazism the Jew of all men is called upon to be especially wary of modern idolatries. In the wake of Auschwitz he needs to affirm again and above all the transcendence of God and that the messianic end does not lie in the purview of man.

V

Up to this point I have deliberately refrained from offering a critique of Fackenheim's thought in the conviction that a sympathetic understanding must come first. At this stage, however, it seems necessary to raise some rather hard questions.

In a most insightful study of Buber's concept of revelation,* Fackenheim suggests two possibilities. The first is that one take seriously Buber's statement that philosophy can only be I-It knowledge. But in that case Buber's argument for revelation springs entirely from the presumed reality of the I-Thou dialogue which cannot be substantiated by philosophy. His doctrine of revelation, then, rests not on philosophical argument but on unargued commitment to the dialogue with God that the reader is called upon to share. If so, Fackenheim holds, Buber emerges not as a philosopher but as "a Hebrew sage in modern garb." The alternate possibility which Fackenheim raises, though it seems far less likely, is that Buber himself recognized a kind of philosophical thought which, while detached rather than committed, transcends the realm of I-It which it criticizes and points beyond that realm to the I-Thou. Philosophy thus comes to be the mediator between I-It and I-Thou knowledge, and for Fackenheim it is only this kind of philosophizing that properly belongs with existential thought.

Fackenheim's own work depends largely upon the validity of such philosophizing. Unless it is granted—and most thinkers would refuse to do so—then most of his writings become a combination of philosophical critique and testimonies of faith without a bridge between them. Insofar as Fackenheim speaks of revelation, he too becomes a sage in modern garb who can speak to those who share his vision but remains powerless to convince those who do not. His endeavors to bring philosophy into the logic of Midrash continually come to grief because in the end an understanding of religious discourse does require commitment; and philosophy, as Fackenheim reiterates, is detachment. Can an uncommitted philosopher really understand the dynamics of prayer or the concept of God's love and grace even if he does suspend judgment as to their truth? Doesn't it need the theologian, i.e., the man who has abandoned detachment? Recently, as Fackenheim has taken his stance increasingly within "the circle of faith," he has made it considerably more difficult for those not sharing his position to comprehend fully the course of his thought.

Questions may also be raised regarding Fackenheim's relation to Jewish tradition. It is the Midrash, not the legal literature, which provides him a link with the past. Yet Midrash, which he regards as the authentic Jewish theology, is the collective product of generations of rabbis whose views frequently stand in complete contradiction. Over the years Fackenheim has chosen to quote a relatively limited number of Midrashim which illustrate the dialectical relationship between God and Israel. He may argue that these selections alone are true to the spirit of Judaism, but to do so is to fall back upon the essentialism he repudi-

* In *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, Schilpp and Friedman, eds., Open Court, 1967.

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ates. One may also ask whether Fackenheim has succeeded in solving the dilemma of liberal Judaism as he posed it. Granted that the Jewish sources must be read with an open mind and not merely to confirm preconceived notions, but as long as there is a possibility of rejection, selection does occur and authority remains ultimately with the present. Moreover, it remains with each individual, for if the weight of the Jewish people's traditional understanding were to become determinative, then Fackenheim would have to deal at length with *halakhah* in its specifics, a theme almost totally missing from his work. And even if the process be deemed not selection but appropriation of divine command, the question arises—perhaps Fackenheim would deem it unanswerable—why God's commands should be so variously appropriated.

It seems also that Fackenheim's critique of religious, and specifically Jewish, idealism is not as devastating as it may first appear. Though absolute, the moral ideal need not paralyze action; it merely places all moral acts in the perspective of humility. Nor need the admission that decision rests ultimately with present consciousness of the right imply that ideals expressed in the Jewish past have lost their significance. As long as they have been only comprehended as ideals, not actualized, they urge to a distant messianic future and radically call into question the moral state of the present. Most importantly, idealism need not imply cultural optimism, though to be sure the two were closely linked in the 19th century. It certainly does not require the notion of inevitable moral progress. Could there not be a new form of Jewish idealism, fully conscious of human and Jewish tragedy, fully realistic with regard to the present, yet asserting its commitment to the prophetic goal despite its distance and accepting it as command? After the Holocaust it seems no longer possible to say anything meaningful about the God of history, but the messianic ideal emerges as even more imperative.

FACKENHEIM has recently argued at length that faith in God is not a hypothesis that allows of empirical tests.* Once made, the commitment of faith is not called into question by any event of history. The Jewish survivor of even a nuclear holocaust, he writes, would only conclude that God had abandoned the world, but he would not therefore abandon God nor the task of beating swords into plowshares. And yet would not God have lost all relation to history? And did He not lose it to Jewish history at Auschwitz? How can Auschwitz be taken with *full* seriousness unless the God of history is also cast into the crucible?

Although the suffering of the righteous has always weighed heavily upon the religious man, the magnitude and proximity of the Holocaust make the issue unavoidable for Jews in our generation. It addresses itself with crucial import to any Jewish theologian who, like Fackenheim, takes history seriously. Can it really be that the God, whom Fackenheim with Buber terms "sole Power," should have allowed the destruction of one-third of the Jewish people and this same God have commanded Jewish survival? My own response is to agree with Fackenheim that a command does indeed issue from Auschwitz, and in general terms I can also agree with its content: to survive as Jews, continuing to hope and to act in an unredeemed world. But I would understand it as the command of a God who is the source of the distant but urgent moral ideal glimpsed by Israel's prophets and sages. For his part, Fackenheim would no doubt reject such a theology as mere "idealism" because my command, like that of the Israeli secularist, is in a sense self-imposed. For him, the source of the imperative can only be the God of history.

Fackenheim thus maintains a position which must have appeal for certain traditional Jews no less than for some liberal ones. While he has been more radically open to the religious significance of present-day, and not alone ancient, Jewish history, his profound concern with the challenge of contemporary "epoch-making events" has in the end not undermined the commitment to a supernatural and revealing God which his earlier writings set out to justify. As a faithful and believing Jew, Fackenheim has not allowed even Auschwitz to rob him of his transcendent faith.

* "Elijah and the Empiricists," in *The Religious Situation*, ed. Donald Cutler, Beacon, 1969.

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Love in Bloom
A Story

Stan Trachtenberg

Now close to forty, Harris "Heshy" Bloom wanted to get married in the worst way. Meeting people was his first problem, after that came others. Too old for dating bars, he froze on ski weekends and still came up empty. Summers were a little better, but by the High Holy Days he had run out again and had to depend on friends to fix him up. This didn't always work out either. On the phone he mumbled, partly for romance, the rest stalling. To get more authority he dialed Information, asking for nonexistent numbers. Waiting, he wondered what it was like to be a phone and filled himself with carbon particles. Black. Blackness. Why no message units? It could be worse. What if the receiver was left off the hook, with me humming, helpless. Worried, Heshy couldn't stop biting his nails, but developed a grip for holding his cigarette to conceal it. Time he gave also to revising past estimates, checking current ones. By the middle of the afternoon he was exhausted. Lunches, he wolfed down a sandwich and tried to cut a few z's in his swivel chair.

Modern science comes lately to confirm the truths of ancient wisdom. With Phyllis, Heshy finally hit on the easy way; get her pregnant. It turned out to be a snap, though the first time she'd made him stop so early that it almost didn't pay. What's more, she refused to stay over, though he offered to make breakfast himself. Nevertheless she got dressed, ate the last of the tuna, smoked a cigarette, and went home. Later she confessed she'd been on the pill all the time.

Even after she moved in with him, Heshy had trouble figuring out what she wanted. Why, for example, did she insist on keeping her old apartment? Let her do one or the other. Also she attached too much importance to her job as a production assistant for Howie Soda at Tandem Films, a local unit. Soda had her running her tail off for no money getting props and lining up production sites. In addition he let her read scripts, nodding absently when she gave her opinion of them. She was learning the business, she explained. Heshy agreed. The trouble was she wanted to swing for a couple of years more anyway, with no hangups about marriage.

Terrific, but where did that leave Heshy? A scriptwriter for a commercial film house, he had earlier taught in a junior high school, but left for more money and better conditions, really because he knew it was only a question of time before some gidge accused him of doing dirty things to her in the supply room. Even if he got off there would always be a doubt. In the film business it was true he could no longer call himself a professional man, but he had known that was to be his fate ever since he had thrown up while taking the law aptitude boards. Here, at least, he could meet actresses, models, God knows who.

In the meantime, one after the other, all of his friends got married. Only Charley, the cocksman, remained, along with Joel "Uncle" Cravitz, who for the last six years on and off had been going with a girl with two kids, unable to bring himself to marry her or even bring her home for a Seder. Why not, Heshy couldn't figure. What was the difference? Joel paid most of the bills anyway and on top of that ate his heart out when the kids went to visit their father on the weekends.

Now, having put in nearly three years with Phyllis himself, Heshy longed to come home to find the laundry done, the dishes put away. He wanted to sit down to a meal.

In quiet moments, Heshy knew what his chances for this kind of life were, with Phyllis anyhow. But against breaking off was the memory of the first time he had seen her. In a one-piece tank suit, no cap. She bathed like a European, her arms spread apart, one foot in front of the other, as though she were walking a crack in the sidewalk. As the waves came up to her body, she leaned forward to meet them, sitting gently on the water or putting both hands in front of her face as though she were coyly trying to stop someone from tickling her. When they grew too high, she gave in altogether, turning her back and kneeling and then rising with the swell. It was then that she had seen Heshy staring at her on the beach. She smiled and waved for him to come in with her.

Phyllis made dinner at his place a couple of times, but preferred cooking in her own apartment, where she knew where everything was.

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Also, since she was going to all that trouble anyway, she might as well have someone over. By the time they finished with the drinks it was at least 9:30, and Heshy wasn't even hungry any more. At first she invited his friends, but she complained lately about each couple. This one didn't like her, that one she didn't like, a third was always busy, a fourth never said anything. All right, let it be her friends. No good either. He didn't get along with them, so what was the point, after all? Who was left? In addition, they were no longer able to decide on what movies to go to, a sore point even in better days. Time, Heshy knew, was beginning to run out on him. All right, on Phyllis too, but twelve years slower.

No chance for deception any more, he had to sell her on having the baby. That almost ended it right there. Ordinarily persuasion was not in his line. His delivery came from the neighborhood he had grown up in. That meant a lot of intensity no matter what the conversation was about, with facts immediately transformed into convictions. Questions were another story. Those he swung like heavy objects or shot out like a rubber band off his fingers. In short, while enthusiastic, he didn't so much talk as reveal things. With commentary. Opponents sprung up everywhere. Who wanted to give in?

This time, however, inspiration carried him beyond Phyllis's objections. Marriage no longer had to be involved in having a child. That was an older generation imposing its morality. There was even a magazine spread—it could have been *Life* or *Look*—showing famous movie stars without husbands, all pregnant, including a group photo, like the annual shot of debutantes mounted on a spiral staircase.

If that was the case, why didn't he have the baby?

A woman needed a child. It was the only way she could really prove she was no longer a slave to the conventions of motherhood.

Still, Heshy didn't get a firm yes until he pointed out how much misery it would bring her father.

Nevertheless, two months after Heshy had at last brought home a positive lab report, having spent at least thirty dollars in false alarms, Phyllis decided they needed to go through the legal formalities in order to take advantage of her Blue Cross-Blue Shield benefits. His friends could come to the ceremony, if not the reception following, at which each setting cost her father more than Heshy earned in a day's work. When some of his relatives were also crossed off, Heshy objected more strongly, but a look from her ended the discussion. He had already made promises regarding the child, most important the name. If a boy, Harris Bloom, Jr. With a name like Bloom, he told her, it wouldn't help. That was just the point. They had to show flexibility. Being stiff-necked brought only an escalation of tensions. If they weren't prepared to compromise, why should anyone else?

Who had offered?

Heshy countered by suggesting that if they had a girl they could call her Phyllis Bloom, Jr. Always the jokester. He didn't really want a child, did he, Phyllis demanded, climbing onto the sink and threatening, even now, to jump if he couldn't be serious about his commitment to the life they had created. Over names, he wasn't prepared to argue. That wasn't enough, there were other conditions, among them that the child had to respect their rights too. Good enough, but would the kid agree? That was up to them. Most important was setting up reasonable rules for behavior and sticking to them, like going to bed at a certain time or what to serve at mealtime. Fine. Phyllis could buy Crunchy Granola till it ran out of her ass. That was another thing. If this was going to be an authentic experience, he would have to do his share of the shopping, as well as other things. Otherwise they would just be going through the motions. She had, she told him, no intention of taking his ego trip.

With Phyllis by this time only four months away, Heshy begged her to slow down. Soda would have to get someone else eventually, if only for the time she was in the hospital. So why not now? Later on, Heshy hoped, she would nurse the baby. Phyllis looked at him as though once more she were seeing the flypaper in his mother's kitchen at the lake.

"It isn't only the money we save," he told her. "I swear it. It's the warmth and love you transmit to the baby. Where else can he get such closeness?"

"Bullshit," Phyllis told him. "You believe that crap you'll believe anything. He'll get plenty of closeness for nine months. That's enough for a lifetime. After it's born, it will get the same warmth from your body as it would from mine. And if it needs more, your mother is just waiting." It was, he heard Phyllis explain on the telephone to one of her friends, the prenatal period that really counted. After that, reinforcement could come from any mother figure. That's what Heshy was afraid of.

Still, in the delivery room, which he discovered cost extra, she cried out to the nurses, "I want my husband!" and squeezed his hand until they wheeled her away. A treasured moment. Afterwards, groggy, Phyllis seemed content for the first time. She agreed to name their son Noah Martin. A small infection requiring penicillin kept her in the hospital an extra week and prevented her from breast feeding in any case. The next week she was back at Tandem, with a ten-dollar-a-week raise that she insisted go toward hiring someone to come in during the day. Mrs. Snow. Efficient, she had come to them by way of two of Phyllis's friends, each of whom claimed

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she was a jewel, though a little old for their children now. Heshy was relieved to see that her hearing was still sharp. She did have trouble with her feet and complained constantly about having to walk up the two flights to their apartment. Also she was not always on time in the morning. With Phyllis gone, it was Heshy who had to give Noah his breakfast, each feeding lasting well over an hour. Waiting for his son to bring up gas, Heshy urged him with his eyes to form a connection. The child remained unfocused. "Noah, forgive me," he begged silently.

Sure that after a while Phyllis would stop fooling around, Heshy thought the mother felt the same way. He should have known better. Mrs. Roy was happy to meet her daughter downtown for lunch as often as Phyllis would let her—at least once a week anyway, sometimes more. It was Soda she came to think of as her son-in-law, especially after he insisted that somewhere she must have had formal voice training. She did admit, however, that she had always been conscious of her posture, even as a child. It was something that just seemed to make some children stand out. Some kind of inner pride, maybe. She didn't know. People had always noticed it about her, and she tried as best she could to give Phyllis the same thing, though sometimes she guessed you couldn't always tell. Did Soda know what a battle they had had to make Phyllis give up chewing gum? When it began to drizzle, Soda insisted Phyllis bring her home in a cab.

By the end of the year, Noah was moving like a leopard. Heshy tried to keep pace, bounding across the room, lifting his son high in the air. Then holding Noah tightly in his arms, he jumped with him, flying toward the ceiling together. A soft landing on the living-room convertible. Heshy looked for signs of disapproval from Phyllis. Busy checking the next day's shooting schedule, she seldom looked up from mimeographed sheets. When she did, it was to stare deeply at some piece of furniture, as though somewhere within it lay the planet from which her ancestors had originally traveled to earth. What was she looking for, props? Life, she once told him, had no meaning except when shaped by the cinematographer's eye. *A fiyer oyf dir*, he thought, and brought his arm up, fingers opening as though breaking from a basketball huddle. At the same time his lips formed Italian curses, dry sounds like sitting on leather.

"You're disgusting," she told him, "do you know that? You really are."

"Disgusting? I'll tell you what's disgusting. That a child is growing up without his mother reading a story to him at night. That's what's disgusting. What are you waiting for? To take him to a screening?"

Phyllis turned on him. "You really resent my having a career, don't you?"

"Only when it interferes with your son's happiness and well-being."

"Has he complained?"

"Does he have to? He's the only nine-month-old in a play group."

"Helene happens to be wonderful with children. Last year she went across the country studying how the Anaconda Sioux raise their young."

"And this year the country is returning the favor. There's another guy up there every time I come. Even Soda I saw a couple of times. I didn't know he had any kids."

Taken by surprise, Phyllis let out a cry. Then she looked at Heshy and saw the truth. Both waited, staring at each other. "You little kike," Phyllis said finally, "you think everyone has a *filthy mind like yours*."

In bed he tried to make it up to her, but as usual she complained that he was being too rough.

"How long does it take you?" she demanded.

"I was waiting for you."

"Oh, go ahead. I can't stand all that rubbing."

What had she meant? Should he continue or try to make it on his own? And what if Noah were to climb out of his crib? Unlikely, but Heshy had heard of such things happening, his son to confront him years later with reproach. "Children can take a lot of different trips," Phyllis assured him when he complained about the number of sitters they had used. Watching someone on top of his mother would be some trip. The planetarium.

"What are you doing?" Phyllis interrupted his thoughts. "Do you know what time I have to get up in the morning?"

"Don't you care about your son at all?" Heshy demanded, outraged.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Phyllis sat up at once. "What has my son got to do with anything? Do you think because I'm not willing to erase myself completely as a person I can't be a good mother? You'd like to believe that, wouldn't you? Well let me tell you this. That child receives as much love and affection as any child in this building. And I'd tell that to any court in the country."

Heshy watched Phyllis pull on her bikini underwear. It was her habit always to sleep in some kind of clothing, lately underwear. Was she in a hurry to get out in the morning? His first thought, a toothbrush, hers, what she would look like in case of an accident. If she was going to get run over in their bedroom she had nothing to worry about. "Why are you getting dressed," he asked, "you going out?"

Phyllis went to the bathroom.

Not moving, Heshy, naked, lay spreadeagled on the bed until Phyllis at last came back to bed. At least this wasn't going to be one of those nights in which she sat by herself in the kitchen, savagely smoking one cigarette after another. "What

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did you mean," he asked suddenly, "any court in the country? What are you thinking about?"

Phyllis sat up and lit a cigarette, but said nothing. It must be Soda, Heshy knew. Would he marry her? And what about Noah? Would he ever know what it was to drink a cherry lime rickey? Who would teach him the stations on the line of the old IND, show him how to lift a puck? Soda? My God, Phyllis, why do you want to throw away everything we've had?

Still not looking at him, Phyllis seemed not to notice the cigarette either now almost burned down to her fingers. Was she going to make a religious experience out of this? He dug his nails into his palm, swearing to say nothing if she didn't speak first. "Would you mind getting an ashtray," she said finally.

"You know, it might be a good idea if you cut down a little."

"Oh, never mind," she said, and jumped from the bed before he could assure her he was going. She brought one back filled with butts. "Since you're talking about good ideas, maybe we ought to live apart for a while. It might give us a chance to get some perspective on this."

So it was true. Heshy felt as though he had jogged too long. One side of his mouth he was sure began to droop. "On what," he insisted, "perspective on what? You haven't told me anything."

"There isn't anything to tell. I simply feel we need some time to find out where each of us is at. You know as well as I do that we haven't been able to relate to each other for a long time."

Overcome by rage, Heshy knocked over the ashtray. "Let's try to be honest for once, huh? You're making it with Soda, all right. At least we can end it with a little dignity. That's why you're so tired when you come home at night, right? It doesn't make any difference now, anyway."

Nothing from Phyllis.

"Look, Phyl," Heshy said softly, wondering if there was still any action possible before they went to sleep. "There's nothing to feel bad about. People change, that's all. I thought we had a good marriage. Maybe I didn't see what I didn't want to. God knows, I guess you tried to tip me off in a million ways."

Phyllis began to cry softly. Heshy sighed and put his arms around her. "Come on, Phyl," he said, "don't be silly."

Asleep at last, Phyllis looked untroubled by anything that had happened. How they had left it, Heshy still wasn't sure. She admitted nothing, and he wound up taking all the blame for being insensitive. Was she going to move out? Or was she just planning to miss dinner a little more often? Somewhere he assured her that marriages could be of different kinds and that the important thing was to hold on to what was essential between them. "I know what that means to you," she said, half smiling. He leered, taking the blame once more. What he had in mind was the couple they had met who had just come back from an encounter-group weekend and were still flying. Each had made it with someone else in the group, the wife planning to keep on going. "This has really been a good thing for us," her husband insisted, but drank plenty. Phyllis leaned forward to get the details. "How did you know which one it would be?" she asked. "Are you going away with him for a whole weekend? Will Jerry come with you?"

Could Heshy live with something like that, eating his liver day and night?

From the next room Noah sighed in his sleep. Heshy fled into his room to look. At first, he could make out nothing in the darkness, not even the outline of Noah's face. Gradually more, but even peering as close as he dared without waking the boy, he could not find definition in his features. Reaching down, he picked Noah up, cradling him in his arms. Noah opened and then closed his eyes. "Should I show you a circus?" Heshy asked. "Do you want to have a Swiss-cheese-and-salami sandwich with me? I'll make each slice thick as a doorknob. I'll cover it with Gulden's brown. And to drink, a little Hoffman's Black Raspberry. Tell me what it is you want, son.

"If you were a little older, Noah, you could understand. We could take walks. Go through my old neighborhood." Though he had been back only once, Heshy could still pinpoint who lived in any building as easily as he could reel off the properties on a Monopoly board, building costs included. He planned to visit his old Hebrew school and see if Rubin, the teacher, was still there. Rubin had given stamps as a reward for fast and accurate reading in the *siddur*. Once, when Heshy had crumbled chalk at the blackboard, Rubin sent him home early. Cocky, he tried to exit with a wave. The class cheered. Rubin addressed them solemnly. "For you," he included all in his nod, "this would be a blessing. For him it is no blessing." Rubin, how well you knew me.

Heshy wanted to wake Noah up to explain what might happen to him and what might be required. He would not understand everything now, but later the scene could come back to him, if not the words. He would know who his father was. Heshy drew Noah tightly against his chest and began to croon in his ear.

"I understand. You're still afraid. Yes, yes, yes. But to be afraid and run away is still to be afraid only someplace else. And who knows even how to do it in a strange place, and all alone.

"Is it that you think I want to take something from you? I'm going to eat you and put you in an oven? Don't be foolish. We have waked up together. Touched each other in the morning. What a shame not to know about such a good thing any longer."

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Heshy blew gently across his son's eyes. "And if there's a little clutching," he asked, "is that so terrible that now you want everything to be finished for good? Where will it be different? Listen to me, not in this world. What then? You feel too young to throw the rest of your life away? But that's not generous enough. I promise you there is more to it than you hear in a Pepsi Cola jingle. There is more than just bathing suits. And now if you change your mind and things are rearranged, you're afraid they'll get away from you. They'll spin around and make you dizzy. So it's you who has to grab and hold on, no matter what. And anyone who comes to pry loose your fingers is the worst sort of monster.

"The first time we went out we went to Riverside Park and flew kites, you remember? You got me a ray gun at the five-and-ten. It clicked and was also a flashlight. Such a gun I saw only once before. A Buck Rogers water pistol I won for naming Cocomalt Island for Little Orphan Annie."

Heshy ran his finger gently along the side of Noah's neck, kissing him behind the ear several times. The boy's warm smell, the smooth, oily flesh made him tremble and he rocked back and forth on his heels. About to fall asleep himself, Heshy put Noah down and went back to bed.

In the morning Phyllis got ready to leave without saying a word about what had happened. Heshy stopped her at the door. "About last night," he said, "I wanted you to know I've been thinking."

"Yes," Phyllis said carefully.

"There'll be no split, that much I can tell you. Try anything funny and I'll have detectives staring up your ass every minute of the day and night. Don't think it's going to be so nice for him either."

"Why are you doing this to me?' Phyllis begged, tears building in her throat.

"For the children," Heshy said, his voice rising like a swelling that no compress would ever bring down.

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A Fever of Ethnicity

Robert Alter

More and more, America comes to seem the land of perpetual identity crisis. First there were the founding Wasps, outcasts, misfits, dissidents, and adventurers who in the momentous crossing of waters had torn themselves loose from the Old World ties of tradition and community. In the vast solitude of the American wilderness—as Oscar Handlin and others have contended—the new settlers had to live with a new kind of existential loneliness that called into question familiar assumptions of value and identity. The characteristic response to this insistent dread inspired by an unpeopled, disorienting new landscape was less a distinctive American identity than a distinctive American fantasy: a self-consciously masculine ideal of craggy independence, toughness, cool resourcefulness, and resolute self-discipline. By the 1950's, that ideal had become for many as factitious as its tinniest embodiments in Hollywood cowboy heroes and fictional private-eyes; and Americans, now no longer preponderantly Wasps, began to look elsewhere for images of identity.

The great vogue of *Yiddishkeit*, beginning in the late 50's and peaking in the mid-60's, was the first signal break from Wasp cultural hegemony, at least on a literary level. Whatever the falsifications and the sentimentality fostered by the vogue, Jewish Americans felt encouraged to look freshly at who they were in the light of their own distinctive experience, while other Americans (some of them undoubtedly Wasps) tried to see in the distorting mirror of Jewishness possibilities of selfhood neglected by the dominant Wasp culture. The Black Power movement of the mid-60's, and the more radical movements of protest of the later 60's, though often a response to particular political grievances, could legitimately be seen as the violent throes of a collective identity crisis affecting certain vocal ethnic groups and social classes. Still more clearly, the emergence of a counter-culture in this same period reflected, as many commentators have noted, a vehement—and for the most part, filial—rejection of the values and models of identity of affluent America, whether old Wasp or second-generation Jewish. The two major alternatives of identity, then, developed in the dissident movements of the late 60's were a submergence of individuality in some paramilitary collective identity among the dark-skinned minorities or revolutionary youth, and a flamboyant antinomianism among the proponents of counter-culture. In both directions, one senses a frantic urgency to *become* in the face of all the forces that seem subtly or crudely to coerce the self, and much the same urgency is detectable in the current women's movement. Saul Bellow's Mr. Sammler nicely catches this special American quality of a driven need to discover oneself in one of his reflections on the more extreme manifestations of the counter-culture:

> Antiquity accepted models, the Middle Ages . . . but modern man, perhaps because of collectivization, has a fever of originality. The idea of the uniqueness of the soul. An excellent idea. A true idea. But in these forms? In these poor forms? Dear God! With hair, with clothes, with drugs and cosmetics, with genitalia, with round trips through evil, monstrosity, and orgy, with even God approached through obscenities? How terrified the soul must be in this vehemence, how little that is really dear to it it can see in these Sadic exercises.

Sammler, one might note, does not coolly put down the new cultural dissidents but rather views them with a compassionate sadness ("How terrified the soul must be. . ."). The idea of the uniqueness of the soul—it is an idea to which I would like to return—seems to him true and excellent, but he is at a loss to imagine how uniqueness can be realized through an absolutism of originality, with no regard for models of emulation. Elsewhere in the novel, he pointedly observes that the programmatic abandonment of models leads only to the unwitting imitation of lesser models, the dream of autonomy translating itself into a grotesque rehearsal of derivative gestures and roles.

Now, the waves of upheaval on the cultural and political Left of the late 60's generally were in one way or another reactions against the increasingly "rationalized" nature of American society, the growth of bureaucracy, large-scale if ineffectual social planning, computerization, corporate commercialism, mindless standardization through the media—all those tendencies that Norman Mailer, over a decade ago, with his characteristic combination of insight and irresponsibility, began to lump together under the rubric "totalitarianism." (Mr. Sammler, too, suspects

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that the "fever of originality" may be the result of modern collectivization.) The dissidents' vigorous reflex of rejection, as Bellow's analysis makes clear, revealed the depth of the problem of identity but offered no viable solution. It might have been predictable, then, that the politics of protest of the late 60's would be followed by a politics of identity in the 70's, one in which a different cultural and demographic base would be proposed for creating alternatives to both the old Wasp myth of strenuous individualism and the depersonalized face of the new corporate America.

Two signs of the changing times are two new books that argue for the political implementation of cultural pluralism in America, Peter Schrag's *The Decline of the Wasp** and Michael Novak's *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics.*† Schrag's book combines slick thinking with an abrasive manner, and since there is little in its argument that is not said more reflectively and more probingly by Novak, it need not be dwelt on here. One of its chief defects, however, does illustrate the principal virtue of the Novak book. Schrag, writing from a standpoint beyond ethnicity, as a Jew thoroughly assimilated into the new culture of swinging protest, exhibits not only icy contempt for the Wasp patricians but also, despite his professed pluralism, a barely veiled disdain for the TV-trapped masses of the lower-middle and working classes. One comes away from his book with the impression that the most shamefully exploited Americans after blacks and Spanish-speaking people are university students. Novak, on the other hand, is a Slovak Catholic intellectual who, just recently involved in articulating a theology of radical politics, has now rediscovered his Slovak ethnicity in the full weight of its political implications; and he begins by reminding us that there are nearly fifty million Catholics in this country, perhaps seventy million descendants of immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain, Armenia, and the Slavic nations. His forceful argument against the Left in particular and the intellectuals in general is that the recent politics of protest has largely ignored the legitimate aspirations, sense of value and self-respect, and the pressing economic needs of these large groups, who have been written off as benighted hard-hats and proto-fascists, have been seen not as various human beings with a special role to play in this country but merely as "pigs," wielders of nightsticks and wavers of flags.

Novak's argument to the electorate at large is that the many millions of derided white ethnics are the swing vote of the future. They have at least as good reason as any other group of Americans to feel deep political resentment. Preponderantly working-class and preponderant in the working class, they constitute a looming proportion of the seventy million Americans whose annual family income is between $5,000 and $10,000; their real income as workingmen declined 3 per cent between 1965 and 1970; typically, the chief wage-earner in the family of this group hits a permanent income plateau by his early thirties, and from year to year life becomes more of a treadmill of grubbing and frustration. On their television screens they are regaled with the expensive gimcrackery and luxury of activity of an upwardly mobile America, and confronted with the contemptuous rejection of their own values in the political protests of the children of the affluent. They themselves, by contrast, enjoy only the most limited economic or social mobility, while still clinging to a stalwart Americanism which now seems decidedly too American to the very educated classes that once encouraged them to adopt it. Simple prudence, Novak plausibly argues, should suggest that the needs of the white ethnic minorities be given considerable priority in future public policy.

Novak's new ethnic politics, however, goes far beyond the old ethnic politics of group self-interest ("Is it good for the Jews?") that has been such a fixture on the American electoral scene. I have called it a politics of identity because ultimately it proposes the tight texture of ethnicity as the one, the true and salubrious means to a viable sense of selfhood. The following rationale for ethnic belonging in America is characteristic of the argument as a whole:

> The emergence of "rational" universal values is dysfunctional since it detaches persons from the integration of personality that can be achieved only in historical symbolic communities. The "divisiveness" and free-floating "rage" so prominent in America in the 1960's is one result of the shattering impact of "forced nationalization" upon personality integration. People uncertain of their own identity are not wholly free. They are threatened not only by specific economic and social programs, but also at the very heart of their identity. The world is mediated to human persons through language and culture, that is, through ethnic belonging.
>
> The function of ethnic belonging is to integrate a person's sense of reality, the stories that tell him how to live, the symbols that move him. These are the matrix in which his conscience receives instruction. By contrast, the American system of individualization and rationalization leaves all but a certain human type profoundly deprived—deprived of initiative and symbolic thickness, unable to function in the nonconnected way demanded by the ethnic symbols of Wasps: individualism, competition, and merely rational interest.

This seems carefully considered, and whatever uneasiness the statement may elicit, it is an argument that needs hearing now. Intellectuals,

* Simon and Schuster, 255 pp., $6.95.
† Macmillan, 321 pp., $7.95.

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accustomed to conceive the realization of self as a matter of individual choice, endowed as they generally are with the economic, geographical, social, and imaginative maneuverability to select from a whole spectrum of values and life-styles, tend to forget that most people simply don't have that wide freedom of choice or energy of self-forging initiative. The alternative to Little Italy or Little Warsaw with their networks of close kinship and distinctive custom is usually not the riches of individualism but a fresh-frozen life in some pre-packaged suburb, Howard Johnson's on Sundays, Disneyland vacations, the cut-rate American dream of happiness out of an aerosol can. Against the corporate-wasteland vision of a standardized American, and against the dissident's extravagant dream of an absolutely original self, Novak suggests that our various ethnic subcultures can offer the self precisely the "models" that it needs—the images, gestures, rituals, memories, modalities of feeling through which a vigorous, confident selfhood can be realized.

NOVAK'S aphoristic summary of his rationale for ethnicity is memorable: "People uncertain of their own identity are not wholly free." It is a point that will be vividly familiar to many Jews, a point, indeed, that has been made repeatedly over the last two centuries by nationally-conscious Jews about the uneasy self-consciousness of assimilated Jews. For much of this period, Western Jewry has been conducting a precarious experiment in combining the preservation of cultural distinctiveness and group solidarity with full participation in the civic and cultural life of larger national communities. In the continuing tensions of this enterprise, Jews have often felt the preciousness of the very values Novak extols—family ties, communitarian closeness, tradition, collective pride. But the modern Jewish experience offers a double perspective on this set of values, for if Jews in some respects have remained exemplary traditionalists, they have also been the modernists par excellence, and it is precisely modernity that gets short shrift in Novak's plea for ethnic belonging. What his argument consistently neglects is that ethnicity can also be a constricting context for identity. The obverse of his aphorism would be equally true: "People preoccupied with their own identity are not wholly free."

Perhaps this truth is more readily perceptible among Jews because historically it has been not ethnicity but rather a sense of peoplehood—that is, an ongoing *national* identity, not just the recollection of common origins in a single "old country"—informed by religious covenant that has bound Jews together. Today, both the covenant and the peoplehood remain as possible options for Jews, together with two highly ramified Jewish intellectual traditions, the classical and the modernist, from which individuals can draw models of identification, resources of experience. Against this background of resonant possibilities, mere ethnicity—B'nai B'rith bowling leagues, Temple Sisterhood fashion shows, lox-and-bagel breakfasts—may seem empty and limiting, a cultivation of clannishness rather than the matrix for the development of a secure and open self.

The fact is that while a genuinely national identity has the flexibility to develop and change with history, ethnicity is by its very nature a conservative concept (keeping up dilute enclaves of the old-country ways in the new), and *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* is indeed a profoundly conservative book. I use the term not as an automatic pejorative, since some of what commands respect in Novak is bound up with his conservatism, but in order to locate precisely the implicit dangers of his outlook. I also do not intend the term in its ordinary journalistic sense, since Novak is clearly aiming his argument somewhere toward the Left wing of the Democratic party, and his ideas on the redistribution of national resources, as much as they can be inferred from his statements here, would put him not far from the social-democratic position of, say, Michael Harrington. The explicit world-view underlying this apologia for ethnicity is nevertheless fundamentally and pervasively conservative.

Novak believes, as we have already seen, that the best integration of personality "can be achieved only in historical symbolic communities." Again and again he exhibits a utopian nostalgia for the traditional communities of the past, never suggesting how those communities could stifle individuals within them, could exert cruelly coercive force on their own disadvantaged or dissident members. (Revealingly, he offers an idyllic image of the Jewish community through the ages as "a people who without governmental or coercively structured economic institutions nourish[ed] in their midst strong persons, strong cultural selves." In point of fact, Jewish communities were usually rigidly hierarchical, both economically and politically, and had their own internal institutions which could be harshly coercive—in recent centuries in Europe, the oligarchic *kehillah* organizations.) Again and again Novak stresses feeling over mind, past over present, collectivity over individuality. "When a person thinks, more than one generation's passions and images think in him. Below the threshold of the rational or the fully conscious, our instincts and sensibilities lead backward to the predilections of our forebears." There may be a nucleus of truth in the assertion, but one becomes uneasy with a language that presents the individual as a passive conduit for the collective past (the past thinks in him) and places such peculiar stress on what is nonrational (passions, instincts, sensibilities, predilections). The sense of uneasiness is confirmed when Novak goes on in the next

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breath to articulate a mystique of ethnic mentality: "Upper-class Quakers *think* and *feel* in a way I cannot think and feel; Jewish intellectuals tend to live and breathe out of writers, concerns, and experiences I can emulate as second nature, but not as first; certain Irish Catholics exhibit emotional patterns I can follow, but not find native to me."

The statement, of course, has a minimal and quite literal validity, but its grand sweep of implication is mere resonant nonsense. The easiest thing to convince yourself of, if you set your mind to it, is that ineradicable, deeply indwelling differences exist between others and you; it is the last thing intellectuals, who after all have succeeded in creating a genuine lingua franca at least among themselves, ought to be doing. I can enter into the thought and feeling of Edmund Wilson far more completely than I can enter the thought and feeling of the Satmar Rebbe; though I have in common with the obscurantist religious leader some Jewish experiences and two Jewish languages, I share with the literary critic an embracing realm of discourse with some of its implicit values, an engagement in American culture and modern experience, and to that basic commonality of enterprise the differential element of Wilson's Wasp background is incidental. Or, to take an example closer to home, I can identify with Michael Novak's writing and thinking far more readily than with Peter Schrag's, though the latter is a Jew, the former a Slovak Catholic, because Novak, whatever his conclusions, respects the same linguistic and intellectual standards that I do, works within the broad modes of logic and conceptualization to which I am accustomed, while Schrag affects a souped-up prose and a turned-on sensibility that I can understand but which seem alien to me.

I risk the gratuitous absurdity of these comparisons to illustrate what is untenable in Novak's position—the implicit tendency to view everything through the prism of ethnic origins, with the social and political contexts of any particular act or statement, the individual psychology of the person or people involved, falling away before the "ultimate" fact of their ethnic identity. Eugene McCarthy's peculiar petulance and negligent manner in the campaigning of 1968 are explained not in terms of his idiosyncratic character but as expressions of his refusal as an Irish Catholic to play the Wasp game of evangelical politics. Norman Mailer's attempt to create a "revolution of consciousness" in his writing (perhaps like that of William Burroughs, whom Mailer has much admired?) is seen not as a function of an individual writer's quirky ambition and imagination but as the reflex of a Jewish sensibility rejecting the images of identity of Wasp America. Even a provocative gesture made by a female student demonstrator to a policeman is viewed not as an attempt to offend an armed representative of the Establishment but as an insult directed squarely at the policeman's ethnic sensibilities. To be fair, Novak's book is by and large more carefully reasoned than these few examples might indicate, but they suggest the inherent danger in making ethnicity the absolute point of departure for all thinking about America. On the level of practical politics, such unrelenting insistence on the primacy of ethnic identity could lead, given the perverse logic of competitive interaction among people, not to a new American diversity but to a Balkanization of political interests and cultural life. At any rate, in regard to the way we think about ourselves, the insistence on ethnicity tends to encourage certain unconstructive simplifications and misdirections of attention.

Thus, a major fault shared by Schrag's *Decline* and Novak's *Rise* is to overstate the case against the already abundantly berated Wasp. To be sure, the Wasp elite has much to answer for in American history, from the virulent Nordic racism it once promulgated to its hypocritical ideology of egalitarian individualism as a mask for privilege and the denial of the dignity of new immigrants implicit in its myth of the melting pot. Nevertheless, both Novak and Schrag, from their different viewpoints, offer what is ultimately a racist reading of American history because, finally, all the ills and wrongs of the nation are traced to some sickness or perversion of the Wasp spirit. Such highly industrialized urban societies as those of France, Germany, and Japan have done quite nicely in producing social pathologies similar to ours unaided by Wasps of their own. Yet reading Schrag and Novak, one infers that all we suffer derives from the arid puritanism, the estrangement from life, the competitiveness, the sexual insecurity, the hatred of the body, the emotional frigidity, the atomistic individualism, the mechanistic view of self and society, that are seen by these writers as the very body and blood of Wasp ethnicity.

All this, of course, merely turns discredited ideas around 180 degrees: the nation is still divided into good guys (immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and dark-skinned people) and bad guys (the paleface descendants of Englishmen and Northern Europeans). This sort of inadvertently Manichean division seems particularly bizarre in the case of a fundamentally reasonable writer like Novak. He implies that, given the imperative fact of ethnicity, there is no common American standard of discourse and value, but his own book illustrates the vigor of just such a standard. He repeatedly insists that the self is mediated by language, and the primary language for almost all ethnics in this country after the first generation is American English—if they choose to write, generally educated Amer-

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ican English at that. Thus, the very categories Novak invokes to defend ethnicity—inner freedom, integration of personality, historical symbolic community, conscience, "imaginative and symbolic thickness"—are conceptualizations rooted in a common Anglo-American idiom of thought, if you will, in the dominant Wasp tradition of discourse.

I WOULD like to return to the conservative implications of founding a view of personality and history on ethnicity. Novak claims at one point that he is not anti-modern, but the "skepticism" he repeatedly evinces toward modernity is so far-reaching that the line between skepticism and actual rejection blurs and fades. If modernization tends to break down traditional social structures, conceives of individuals as free agents, reduces family, clan, and ethnic group to mere options instead of necessary contexts, it must be viewed as a threatening, negative process: "Modern civilization—urban, fluid, democratic, determined to change history—is a Nordic invention. The men of the south and the east have long been skeptical about its outcome." The statement makes clear not only the grudging attitude toward modernity (including democratic process) but, more embarrassingly, the gross distortion of a racial reading of history.

Repeatedly, Novak imagines modernization as a pulverizing mechanical force that assaults traditional life from without: "The weight of every conceivable social practice and psychological instruction is to break up extended families and to atomize nuclear families. The fission of America seems to focus upon all organic, communal links." Though "atomize" and "nuclear" are of course intended in a sociological sense, their use here in quick sequence with "fission," set over against the idea of organic community, suggests a doomsday image of social change as a kind of slow-motion hydrogen explosion blowing apart the "natural" wholeness of pre-modern life. The metaphor of modernity as a destructive mechanism or a technological "processing" that threatens organic growth recurs elsewhere, and it may make one a little nervous, for it has been invoked before by others in the service not of a tolerant conservatism but of fanatic reaction.

Since intellectuals as a class have been the great catalysts of modernity, the social planners, the spinners of schemes for radical innovation, Novak devotes more than a third of his book to a critique of the intellectuals. It is precisely here that one sees most vividly both the positive value and the ultimate danger of conceiving culture and politics in terms of ethnicity. Novak, let me hasten to say, is not anti-intellectual but fits clearly into the tradition, going back to Burke and Tocqueville, of conservative attack against the excesses of the intellectuals. That tradition has recently been described by Peter Steinfels, an associate editor of *Commonweal*, as "counter-intellectualism."* Counterintellectualism at its best, Steinfels writes, "is an antidote for the nonsense which the intellectuals are always capable of producing," and there obviously has been no slack in the production of such nonsense over the past few years in this country. Novak seems especially sound in his sustained assault on the elitism of the intellectuals, their general failure to imagine as real people large segments of our population unlike themselves, their fondness for abstract schemes of social amelioration that are out of touch with the needs and desires of many of the people whose lives are being planned.

The notorious arrogance of the intellectuals, however, is for Novak merely a secondary manifestation of their primary error, which is nothing less than their adherence to "an image of history favoring the future," an image reflected in the very use of the metaphor of an avant-garde for the intelligentsia. From the ultimate viewpoint of a conservatism that seems theological as well as political, Novak sees this commitment to the future as a kind of anthropocentric heresy: "To be on the side of the future (a benevolent future, safeguarding the continuous progress of man) is the equivalent [for modern intellectuals] of standing in the presence of God." It has of course been a long time since such naive faith in continuous progress was a serious intellectual position, but one wonders why the intellectual aspiration to make the future more humanly livable than the past should be inherently suspect. Novak cannot be proposing that we simply reconcile ourselves to the bottomless misery and outrageous inequities of the present and the past; he surely does not want us to go back to the repressive feudalism of some *ancien régime*, or even to an America before the social legislation of the New Deal and its aftermath. Social planning and progressivist ideologies have been guilty of dismal blundering and unfounded self-assurance, but must that discredit the very attempt to use reason to construct a future which will not compound all the hideous mistakes of the past?

The intellectual's indispensable role, whatever his sins, has been to envisage alternatives, to imagine new possibilities. According to Novak, however, "his function is not to lead, in the way an avant-garde leads, or in the way planners, managers, and experts lead," but rather "the intellectual's vocation is to be a voice of the people—to put into words what they already know." Though Novak realizes that not everything in the people is admirable—what the intellectual will put into words will "terrify" as well as "illuminate"—he nevertheless comes disturbingly close here to a mystique of *Volkstum*, which hardly seems what we want to return to after all

* "The Counterintellectuals," *New American Review 14*.

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that has been perpetrated in its name in recent history. The individualistic assertion of self, beginning as far back as the Renaissance (and *not* merely among Anglo-Saxons!) has admittedly been one of the most tortuous enterprises of modern culture, but it also has been heroic, incurring great inner risks in order to realize a new order of inner freedom. In this enterprise, the assertive voice of the intellectual has often been abrasive or disdainful but it has been necessary, and I think one must strenuously resist any suggestion that the time has come for the intellectual to submerge himself in the people, or that the most valid realization of self can come only through the people.

It is simply wrong to say, as Novak does, that individual autonomy and personal authenticity are Wasp concepts, limited to the assumptions of Wasp ethnicity. They are, rather, key concepts of modern culture in general—paradoxically, without them Novak would hardly have written his book. Whatever the enormous difficulties in the realization of these ideals, the very currency they enjoy points to a new horizon of possibility for every human being. That horizon, as Novak justly observes, will scarcely beckon at all to large numbers of people; nevertheless one must be grateful for its mere existence, for the fact that a person can at least in part free himself from subjugation (in some degree it is always that) to the community and the past in order to realize his selfhood according to his own needs. Granted, the self always requires a social context and always uses previously experienced models in creating its own goals: the dream of absolute originality, as Mr. Sammler reminds us, is a dream to drive men mad. But Mr. Sammler also knows that individual uniqueness is a true, an excellent idea; and modern individualism, whether as a social ideology or a pervasive style of intellectual discourse, has sustained the live and various possibilities of fulfilled uniqueness, however imperfectly and intermittently. Each of us must live between the relentless dialectic tensions of communal norms and the self's imperatives; to disallow either side of the dialectic is to expose the self to crippling impairment, from without or from within.

Ethnicity, to be sure, in no way implies the extirpation of individuality, but one is entitled to be suspicious of any political philosophy that might compromise or circumscribe the individual's scope for discovering his own uniqueness. At this point in American history, it seems less than helpful, and it could be pernicious, to promote atavistic feeling at the expense of reason; to proffer a thoroughly ahistorical ideal of innocent organic community as an attainable goal; to suggest that the highest vocation of the intellectual is to become the voice of the people; and, above all, to insist that the ultimate cause of our present national disarray is an ideal of individualism allegedly deriving from white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism.

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Agony in the Clubhouse

A Portrait of the Reform Democrats

Dorothy Rabinowitz

After faltering for the past years into the oblivion that aged revolutionists are heir to, the New York City Reform Democrats have returned to the front pages and to the chaos which is their natural state. For reasons best known to herself, Bella Abzug, gerrymandered out of her Congressional seat, chose to challenge the first Reform Democrat of them all, William F. Ryan, in a contest whose resonance carries far beyond the Upper West Side of Manhattan. In the Bronx, with only a shade less clatter, it would appear that Mr. Clean is fighting Mr. Wonderful: the two stalwarts of Reform in that borough stronghold of machine politics, Jonathan Bingham and James Scheuer, have gone to war against each other. On a grander scale, the veterans of the McCarthy-Kennedy battle era of 1968 are polishing the stones of old grievance for whatever new may come in Miami in the name of Humphrey or McGovern: but the names are interchangeable. The Reformers are what they have always been at heart.

Indeed, the Democratic Reformers have been with us for so long that most of us have forgotten what came before them. It is, of course, something less than precise to apply the name "Reformers" to people who have been around for thirty years. The Reform label now attaches to six Congressmen and a near majority of district leaders in Manhattan, and cuts a swath among city politicians which can only be rooted in ambition's generosity of imagination. It is hard to remember the Reformers as they once were, those ideologues who filled the clubhouses of the West Side and the East Side with the hullabaloo of their chastity; they could not know, of course, in their triumphant days as the "outs" that one day in the not-far-off future, their political passion would summon giggles (not least from those once their own) and they themselves would be murmured over as victims of a malaise, of "chronic insurgency." Still, there were those days; hardly a man is now alive who can bear to remember them. Nor will he, if he was part of the early Reform movement, recognize the current crew who go under the name. As likely as not, he has long ago left off attending the Reform clubs, for the less emotional life of the family, the less competitive atmosphere of business, the more productive life of movie-going. More than likely, he listens to news of the Reformers with a damp shudder. It was not always thus.

Perhaps some history: before the advent of the Reformers in the late 40's, the traditional local political clubs were composed mostly of Irish immigrants who had become interested in local politics as an aid in getting jobs as policemen and firemen. These regulars exhibited a talent for divining that in politics one and one equals two, and a sense of organization which, when coupled with charm and piety, enabled them to produce a heavy vote from both the living and the dead on successive election days. In each neighborhood bailiwick, a process of natural selection produced that individual male capable of carrying something to its inevitable conclusion. (The Reformers would be constrained, both by the nature of their vows and their psychology, from acquiring this capacity.) That individual dealt with those on top and those on the bottom, and he distributed among his relatives and friends the largesse in jobs and contracts created by an increasingly affluent city government. If he did his job well, his friends and relatives were happy. If he did his job poorly, a quiet revolt was enough to depose him. When he died, the relatives and friends selected one of their number to carry on his good works.

The concerns of the regulars were job, family, and church. They took little note of national issues, of civil or international war, trade or monetary policies. They located their activities in the clubhouse, a choice which followed naturally from their need to congregate in an atmosphere of friendliness, and from their need to leave their women at home. (Almost to this day, many regular clubs permitted only Ladies' Auxiliaries, and in some, no ladies were welcome.) The clubs identified themselves simply: unfettered by latter-day dogma, they selected names like the Eugene Macmanus Association because there was no point in advertising anyone but their current leader.

On such entrenched familial concerns would the Reform Democrats cut their teeth; against such an experience of politics would they conceive the new. Evolving from the Fair Deal and the Young Democrats of 1947-48 vintage, a certain few of the Young Turks of the Democratic party formed a nucleus of Reformers dedicated to vanquishing all the works of the old clubhouse. They would banish patronage, and the political corruptions that followed therefrom. They would take the party away from the machine, and they would open up the political process. Inspirited with the will of an in-

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formed citizenry, they would put an end to favors, to judge-buying; to the propensity of the old-line leaders for ignoring national issues and even Presidential candidates in favor of securing the votes for the local politician or his hand-picked candidate for the civil court.

This cavalier unconcern for the national candidate was a slight thing, compared to the other offenses the old line perpetrated. In one historic instance, nevertheless, it was galling enough to the Reformers to begin the demise of a heretofore powerfully entrenched regular district leader. Perhaps he could not know who and what Adlai Stevenson was to the segment of the population which had taken him to their hearts—that prose-hungry, yearning, and outnumbered band who had identified a voice of sensibility in national politics: but Dennis J. Mahon, regular Democratic leader of the Upper West Side, made no secret of his indifference. Before the astonished ears of Stevenson constituents (a population at that time unknown to the party clubhouse) Mahon allowed that his interest lay primarily in assuring the election of the local district leaders and the judges. Murray Kempton said, in 1952, after Stevenson's defeat, that after losing this one he could not bring himself to shake anyone's hand. The Stevensonites were more single-minded in their wrath. After the election, they got together and set themselves the task of removing Mahon and his regulars from the district leadership. They were relatively young, they were few, they were educated, they were members of the middle class, and they had been brought to their insurgency almost involuntarily. They were also new to the political game. Nonetheless, the candidate they ran defeated Mahon (the issues had, of course, broadened a bit by this time from the initial slight to Stevenson, but only in the hearts of some of them), and the club they founded was the celebrated FDR-Woodrow Wilson.

THE FDR-Woodrow Wilson Club, the Lexington Club, the West Side Club, the Village Independent Democrats, the Ansonia Club: they were names which would invariably bring a chill to the spirits of the old-line Democratic leaders and a groan from the political press corps assigned to keep track of their adventures. From the very first, the Reformers were good copy. From their initial victories, which were aided by the militant leadership of Herbert Lehman and Eleanor Roosevelt, the Reform fight for districts grew by leaps and bounds. Aided, too, by an astonishing partiality for political insurrection which appeared to locate itself on the Upper West Side of New York and parts of the East Side, the Reformers soon began to take local leaderships. They were good campaigners in many ways, intrepid vote-pullers and tireless signature-gatherers. In what some consider a high-water mark in their achievement, the 1966 Surrogate race (the first instance, it will be remembered, in which Robert Kennedy took a hand in the internal politics of New York), the Reformers managed to gather 12,000 signatures in four days. They had had their earlier great victory in 1961, when they rode in on a citywide anti-machine wave with Robert Wagner. It was in 1961 that the Village Independent Democrats beat Carmine De Sapio finally: poor De Sapio, who in his early days had himself come into politics as an insurgent against Tammany, now found himself, in his own Village territory, surrounded by Reformers howling from motorcades which started off from VID headquarters in Sheridan Square. "Beat De Sapio!" the hot-eyed girls yelled from cars to the astonished Italians in the South Village.

Night and day, the teachers, lawyers, and bookstore clerks of Greenwich Village—with an assist from like-minded insurgents from Brooklyn and the Bronx—drove their cars around the already fun-filled streets of the Village, shouting about De Sapio. They were happy then. And it would be the remarkable destiny of the Reformers that they would be fixated at this place in their history. For even when they had beaten De Sapio and won a considerable number of other battles, they would see themselves thus, riding around, yelling in lone splendor against impossible odds.

The peculiar fate of the Reformers, it would turn out, would be their incapacity to take in the idea of winning; to incorporate their victories as a rightful consequence of the efforts they had made. On the contrary, they would seem more at home with the notion that the rightful consequence of the efforts they had made should be an unrelenting aura of frustration and bitterness which colored their attitudes, even hard upon the heels of some victory or other. Former Mayor Wagner tells of the time a group of Reform leaders came to Gracie Mansion in 1961. They met to consult with the Mayor's friend and associate, Judge Simon Rifkind, a man of seasoned political thinking who, as Wagner reports, asked them rhetorically, "'Look, are you interested in winning these elections?' They said, 'Not really.' They said this to Rifkind. *To Rifkind*!" On that visit the Reformers indicated, as they had so often, that they were interested in the weightier issues of Reformist thought far more than winning practical control of the party or anything—though no one fought harder to win individual fights, and no one sulked longer after losing them. (Events have not disappointed them: there are Democratic Reformers in every aspect of New York political life except that which actually controls the party.)

It had been the Reformers' notion to bring the New England town meeting to New York politics: they would bring participants to the democratic process to have their say. They succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. They gathered to their clubhouses hordes of citizens whose sole interest, it soon appeared, was to have a say at considerable length. The New England town meeting never saw such fires as burned in the Reformers' clubhouse on the issues of the day. But to be more precise, the issues of the day did not matter very much: the problem which really exercised the members had to do with the method of approaching the issues of the day.

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These were the justly famed "procedures" battles whose hold on journalists and other fascinated observers is, in a grim sort of way, still unrivalled. The Reformers' clubhouses were always located on the second floor of a storefront, whether they were the headquarters of the relatively sedate East Siders or of the more proletarian and livelier West Siders. On the night of a meeting, one climbed the shabby, ill-lit stairs and opened, always with something of a shock, onto the hard fluorescent lights and the density of a Reform environment. The furnishings were austere, not to say grim. In the center of a loft-length room, hard wooden chairs were stacked in rows. On them and in corners of the room, the unused literature of past campaigns lay unpromisingly about. The only amenities were an occasional Coke machine and a seldom-used toilet: the Reformers never trusted each other long enough to go to the bathroom in the course of a meeting. On the walls, the visages and the testaments of former local candidates hung in tatters. Higher up and more permanent, the tranquil eyes of FDR looked without surprise on all they viewed. And that might be much. Few grass-roots political movements can claim the kind of coverage Reform assemblies still get from newspapers at the promise of a typical meeting. And for good reason.

FROM the beginning, the Reformers were avid, internecine fighters. Despite the fact that the cornerstone of the Reformist stance was political morality, they were not above worldly tactics in their own clubhouse fights. Body-packing—the method of insuring a winning number of votes on a given issue—was arranged by the simple means of buying the $5 or $6 membership dues for people who lived as far away as Connecticut, and carting them in on the night their votes were needed. This simple, old-line tactic became, in the hands of the Reform club-debaters, a subject of immense moral complexity. One club, the famed FDR-Woodrow Wilson, debated till two in the morning (an hour not at all uncommon for the Reformers; it was always still the shank of the evening as long as there were yet people who had not delivered themselves of the burden of their thought) on whether they should take a vote on the question of taking a vote. The *ultimate* subject was whether the club should give voting privileges to certain "bodies" who had been carted in as new members for that night's vote. The original question for which the meeting had been called—a red-hot housing issue—would soon be a dim memory in the minds of the membership. At two, the members voted to have a vote. Then the members who voted to have a vote began their debate on the vote. The outcome belongs to the ages now. But it was on such evenings—and they were by no means rare—that the Reformist personality battened. It was always the remarkable feature of these performances that the issues which exercised them night into morning were always quite simple. The regulars, to take an instance, looked upon body-packing as the plain pragmatic knavery it was. In the hands of the Reformers, the self-same act might work upon them as a prism, turning infinitely various reflections of moral light. The same attitudes held for all voting procedures, the oft-thumbed *Roberts' Rules of Order* to no avail. It was as though, in seizing on the simplest possible issues as the place to take a stand, the Reformers understood that genuinely complex matters have an intrinsic drama that overshadows all the players. Their real interest, they seemed to know, was to make great things from small, thus to give principle and commitment their fullest play; for it was on these comparatively settled questions that the majesty of their forensic and reasoning abilities stood clear.

In this, they would not always be constant. When the Reformers went for the issues, as they did in the 60's, they went for the big ones. From the patronage-fighting, hair-splitting morality of the 50's type of Reformer, the 60's breed evolved. The issues of peace and urbanism had taken hold by then. Rhetoricians had begun successfully to tie the problem of civil rights and poverty to the war in Vietnam. It was confidently suggested (and not alone to the Reformers) that the end of the war in Vietnam would somehow mean an end to poverty and to the similar ills which plagued our society. But to the Reformers, this causal relationship was particularly compelling. They had spent a good long time wearing themselves out fruitlessly over purist political forms. The regulars showed they had reason to be impressed with their style (and had, in some instances, begun to imitate a good thing. When Reformers were offered deals and votes, here and there, they could stall each other and their regular compatriots before making a decision by falling back on the old point in the Reform catechism and reciting, "I have to consult my club, I can't say anything without the approval of my membership." No one was surprised when finally J. Raymond Jones—old-line black leader known respectfully both to his cohorts in the regulars and to the Reformers as "The Fox"—demurred at decision-making in similar circumstances, murmuring with all the rectitude of a Reformer that he could not speak without consulting the membership of his club). Now the Reformers were ready to throw themselves with the same intensity into ending the war.

Charles Kinsolving, veteran campaign strategist and a Reformer for twenty years, recalls his attempt to gather support for Eugene McCarthy with the help of the Reform constituency. "You'd tell them, 'Look, go push doorbells where people don't know about McCarthy, go to the other districts.' But they didn't want to do that," Kinsolving says, still quizzical, "they wanted to stay with their peer groups and polemicize about how we should get out of Vietnam—with people who already felt just the way they did. It made them feel good."

IN THE early 60's, a heavy influx of SANE and other, similarly inclined membership, began to shape the new priorities of the Reformers. The same people who had waxed long into the night about the fine points of democratic pro-

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cedure found, with the inspiriting aid of the SANE types, that they could turn their energies to issues worthier of their moral rigor than keeping up the fight against the local machine candidates—many of whom had begun anyway to sound all too much like the Reformers themselves. They besought each other now on a new question: How to keep the atom bomb under control? To be sure, there were some Reformers who felt that this question was somewhat outside the purview of the concerns their movement had originally set itself, but they were outnumbered. By the mid-60's, the Reformers had taken to their ranks a large number of people from the Women Strike for Peace; and the atom bomb was supplanted by the issue which was to remain the major concern of the Reform Democratic movement unto this day: how to end the Vietnam war?

The question elicited a variety of solutions from the Reformers who examined themselves long hours in their clubhouses, and at their public forums, on the question of amnesty for the Vietcong and on the timing of troop withdrawals. Certain Reformers, working in McCarthy's 1968 campaign, wanted to offer up to the Democratic convention not one, but several slates. Several slates were better than one, they reasoned, and each extra slate would serve the purpose of making various Democratic factions compete for the most extreme peace position. They worked busily up to the day of the convention, guided by the principle they called "keeping dialogue open." What it meant was, they might give support to the slate which offered amnesty to the Vietcong; on the other hand, they might wait and see who would offer a halt to the bombing —a competition whose benefits to the cause of peace must have seemed obvious to them.

Representing as they did only a sector of the advanced political thought of the Reform movement, these plans cannot be said to have won broad support. But the Vietnam question did provide an entirely new frame of reference by which the Reformers would judge themselves and their candidates. Where, a decade or less ago, the crucial issue turned on keeping one's political head high above the squalor of machine politics and patronage deals, the question now was, "When were *you* for peace?" No candidate for Reform votes, whether for district leader, State Senator, or Congressman, escaped examination on the time, the very month of the year, when he had called for an end to the war. And the candidates answered in kind: "I called for a halt to the bombing as early as March 1966." It did not matter where they called for a halt to the bombing, whether in the 72nd Street clubhouse of the Roosevelt Independent Democrats or on the floor of Congress; for in truth, it did not matter whether the candidate was running for club treasurer or for Congress; his credentials on the peace issue were of equal consequence to the Reformers.

One of the most significant casualties of the peace issues and, in a larger sense, of Reform sensibilities, was Leonard Farbstein, long a regular Congressman for the 19th Congressional District. Repeated Reform challenges failed to displace Farbstein, but did succeed in transforming him, year by year, from a nondescript old-line type into the very model of a Reform legislator. He had been at this Congressional job a great many years, and he could not undo all the habits of mind that a start from Mitch Bloom's regular club could give a man (nor could he gainsay the power of so shrewd and successful a patron as Bloom); but he tried. He learned to look at Congressman William F. Ryan when he was not sure how his vote should go, and when Ryan's hand went up, Farbstein put his up. In the best democratic fashion, he had been tutored by his constituents and had learned to change with them: soon, he had compiled the best legislative, the best Reform record, of any regular in the House.

He had gotten to be an old man, being such a good Reformer. He had had to try harder and be better than the Binghams and Scheuers (Mr. Clean and Mr. Wonderful) and such, who had always sported the Reform label. But however good he got, it didn't matter to the Reformers, who had never changed in their determination that Farbstein was unworthy. For it is the peculiar feature of the Reform sensibility that a flawed man cannot be shriven: peculiar, because it is a belief deeply ingrained in the thought of men who had come together for the express purpose of fostering change; and yet not peculiar, for their interest in "opening up the democratic process" had always coexisted with an astonishing degree of totalitarian spleen, with a lasting vengeance against non-conformists, and no less against those who conformed after early falling into Error. To the arguments proposed by some few Reformers—notably those who held legislative office—that Farbstein was now an excellent Congressman, the mainstream of Reform averred that Farbstein had not, in any event, voted for a bombing halt as early as he might have, and they found the candidate who would finally depose him. After a typical, blood-chilling fight among the Reform factions, only one candidate emerged from the Byzantine designations procedures as Farbstein's challenger. To the horror of a large number of Reformers (the legislative leaders in particular) it was Bella Abzug. The rest is history. She won, with her Women Strike for Peace army, with the large number of Reformers who united behind her against an old enemy, and with her women's support. But above all, Farbstein lost it. He had surrendered his power base, year by year. The captains in the old-line club which was his stronghold, were no longer willing to put themselves out for this captive of Reform. Being too good a Reformer, Farbstein lost to Reform and to Bella Abzug, who was herself now onto a good thing: in the notion of loyalty to one's own sex, she would mine a vein in politics richer than any old democratic ideal. And she did it.

It was always evident that those legislators in the Reform movement who could allow merit for such as Farbstein were in the minority. Nonetheless, their existence underscores a quality in Re-

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formers which must be interesting to all grass-roots movement watchers. There was always a difference between the Reformers elected to office and their constituents. Once elected, Reformers would invariably grow less dogmatic than their supporters. Experience, *Realpolitik*, or perhaps it is the plain expansiveness that comes to those who have been rescued from the toils of anonymity by being elected to office, all help transform the Reform zealot into a man at least willing to talk to the other side. Thus, the elected Reformer soon finds himself, by virtue of his election and his subsequent maturation process, far behind his constituency in pursuit of moral fervor, at odds with them on goals and priorities in all manner of things that they once held dear in the same degree.

That the Reformers failed to touch boroughs outside of Manhattan, with the exception of a few seats in the Bronx, and consistently fail to make inroads in the real party machinery, owes not a little to their divisiveness, the incapacity to form coalitions which has been their psychic trademark from their beginnings. Assemblyman Albert Blumenthal, a singularly undogmatic Reformer—a man of reliable spontaneity who offered to punch his detractors in the mouth on at least two occasions (once on the floor of the Assembly and once on the streets of the Upper West Side)—put it recently: "You get elected to something, you find you better shake hands. I want my bills to pass." And so they do.

Most elected Reformers, however, feel they have to pay lip service to their constituents, and so must behave with a semblance of ideological rigidity, even against their better wisdom. Thus, they could never initiate the tradeoffs with the other powers in the Democratic party, even when those tradeoffs would have been in their interests. They could not, for example, say to the regulars, "Okay, in place of the civil court judge in Harlem, which we can't win anyway, you give us other votes we want." This is not to say that the Reformers did not make deals or accept patronage. They do indeed make deals, but in their odd fashion. The Reformers cannot say, "If we say yes to Brown, they'll give us a judgeship for Smith." The regulars won't *say* such things either, but in their case, that is because it is all understood. What the Reformers are forbidden to say, however, they are often ready to do. And the difference between Reform leaders and regulars is largely in degree of forthrightness, a complication which cannot but add to the involuted psychological strains in the Reform movement.

Those strains have worn the movement out, finally. Only a core of the hardy remains of the old membership, the old spirit. Some of the constituency found other outlets for their interests; most simply wearied of night-long meetings, of infighting and personality clashes which managed to dominate even so grand an issue as the Vietnam war. One of the more remarkable things about this essentially college-educated chunk of the polity was its resistance to the rules of Jeffersonian debate, and to democratic procedure. They did not appear to see any *point* in the will of the majority. In short, when people in Reform clubs lost on some issue or other by a vote of 80 to 45, a large number of that 45 was likely to go home mad and stay there. The regulars proved themselves much more likely to unite behind the majority will, largely because any other course was unthinkable. That the side with the most votes wins, has never seemed a matter subject to question, to the regulars. To the Reformers, it was a new idea every time.

The core of old-time Reformers who survived have had to accommodate themselves to changing times and to new orthodoxies. One or two of them, challenged in the last few years by a new breed of child Reformer, have learned to eschew some old Reform attitudes in response to the attacks the twenty-year-olds were making on certain West Side district leaderships. The "kids," as they were called, held the old Reformers to account for all the things that the New Politics could summon to mind. In addition, they had been weaned in Reform clubs, and so lacked none of the contempt that familiarity makes possible. The kids claimed that the old Reformers lacked contact with the people, with the blacks and Puerto Ricans; they were too middle-class, they lacked substantive issues. To be sure, certain of the Reformers agreed with them. No less a kid than Manfred Ohrenstein, Reform State Senator for as long as anyone can remember, confides now that the Reform movement, in his eyes, always lacked contact with the people. Ohrenstein, whose Fu Manchu mustache and raffishly low hairline tell of a man who wears the wave of the future comfortably, is a perfect emblem of an old-breed Reformer turned contemporary. He has left off the evils of patronage and back-room governance in favor of a new *Realpolitik*—a derivative of leftover New Leftism and old-style Populism. He is impatient now with fancy names and procedures in the democratic process; substantive issues concern him now, the poor, the blacks, the Puerto Ricans, the young. "The Reform movement—the old Reform movement was just too full of middle-class people," he explains.

It is the new breed, but it is the old breed, with a peculiar twist. Ohrenstein has, these past years, taken to telling the Jews of the Upper West Side about their responsibilities. "See, the Jews are the haves of the city," he explained once. His middle-aged-to-elderly Jewish constituents—social-security pensioners and SRO occupants—listen. Recently, he related to this writer in detail the premise which guided him. "Look, look, who owns the pawnshops in Harlem? Who? What kind of a person would own a pawnship? It takes a certain *mentality* to own a pawnshop."

So IT goes. Ohrenstein is up for re-election this year. In any other constituency, the utterance of such stuff would be enough to inspire the voters to rise up and trounce the man. On the other hand, one is never sure about a Reform bailiwick, where the voters have had so long to listen to pathology offered up as principle; one could

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not be surprised if habituation dulled the ear. To be sure, Ohrenstein's case is unique. But by and large, the Reform movement has yielded an awesome variety of pathological symptoms. The tears, the wrangles, the chairs thrown at public meetings, the old friends become sworn enemies overnight —have all contributed to the complex, faintly comical position the Reform movement holds in history now. Recalling their propensity for fighting with each other, former Mayor Wagner constructs a thin smile to the memory of certain long nights. "I used to get mad too, sometimes: but then I figured, what's the use of two people getting mad?"

It is safe to say that few members of the Reform movement ever reasoned thus. But there are deeper reasons for their chronic disturbances. They might run something like this: From the beginnings of society, politicians, like other men, arranged themselves and their activities in accordance with a psychic instinct. And it was that instinct that Freud fathomed and refined in its countless forms, that assumption which no psychological system known to man has ever disputed.

It is, simply, that people expect rewards. From the time they are infants, they learn that they will get things if they are good. The regular politicians, like everyone else in the world, operated accordingly. The Reform Democrats tried to deny a cardinal principle of the psyche. They said, "Be good and expect no rewards for your behavior." The consequence of this mass denial is, not surprisingly, Reform Democrat schizophrenia. Battling for position, for points in moral stature for lack of any other legitimate reward, the Reformers are as confused as men and women have a right to be, in their circumstances: they were thrown into a league against nature, and nature exacted its retribution. Driven, eternally furious, and recoiled upon themselves, the Reformers are surely not the first people to offer dogma in refutation of natural law; but they may well be the first political movement to go mad in the attempt, district by district.

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Books in Review

Ideology and Truth

LET HISTORY JUDGE: THE ORIGINS AND CONSEQUENCES OF STALINISM. By ROY A. MEDVEDEV. Translated by Colleen Taylor. Edited by David Joravsky and Georges Haupt. *Knopf. 566 pp. $12.50.*

Reviewed by ROBERT CONQUEST

THE publication of Roy A. Medvedev's *Let History Judge* is an event of real importance. This is the first time a Soviet writer has tackled the whole question of Stalinism, attempting to analyze the entire dreadful phenomenon and place it historically. Whatever weaknesses we may note in the book, we must still feel it is a splendid effort. That Medvedev, brought up in the strictest party orthodoxy, and still by no means wholly free of that heritage, can yet rise to the level of a huge critical effort, is a matter for unstinted praise—far more, in this sense, than should be given to a scholar writing in full liberty in the West—whatever the blemishes to be found in the actual text. On the other hand, it would be insultingly patronizing to pass over such blemishes uncritically, simply out of respect for the moral and other exertion put into the writing. Medvedev's book deserves the compliment of being discussed seriously.

As in so many recent cases the mere fact of the book's reaching us provokes queries, but it should be said at once that the authenticity of *Let History Judge* is not in doubt. Generally speaking, the best way we have of deciding on the authenticity of *samizdat* (self-published) documents appearing in the West is that if they are genuine the author does not repudiate them—or else, as was the case with a poem of Alexander Tvardovsky's, he repudiates them in a derisory fashion by condemning them on trivial grounds (such as that the title has been altered).

Naturally, on this basis, there can be no guarantee of authenticity *before* publication in the West. Of various pieces attributed to Roy Medvedev which have appeared here, there was one which he repudiated. It appeared, as a high proportion of these manuscripts do, in the émigré magazine *Possev*. When Medvedev repudiated it the editors of *Possev* quite reasonably explained that though they do their best to check on such material (and their record has been excellent), they could not refer in each case to the author, as positive authentication would naturally put him into an awkward position vis-à-vis the KGB. Now, *Possev* is the organ of the strongly anti-Communist NTS. We might agree almost as little with its particular views as with those of the Communist party of the Soviet Union (or of Medvedev himself). But in obtaining and publishing *samizdat* material it has continually performed a service of the utmost use both to us in the West and to Russian *samizdat* writers themselves.

In his introduction to *Let History Judge*, David Joravsky deals with this question, but in an absurd and sectarian fashion. He hurls totally unwarranted abuse at *Possev*. (He even speaks of "fabrication," but there is no real reason to believe that the document falsely attributed to Medvedev was in any case fabricated—certainly not by *Possev*, which could have no conceivable interest in doing so. On the face of it, it is genuine *samizdat*, but with a mistaken or false attribution—unless, indeed, it was placed with some intention of discrediting *samizdat* altogether.) Roy Medvedev himself is much opposed to the anti-Communist émigré organizations (although it is conventional in Soviet circumstances even for people who need not feel strongly about the matter to denounce the émigré press), but in *Let History Judge* he is far from reproaching a well-known Soviet defector, F. Raskolnikov, for having his own attack on Stalin printed in a reactionary émigré journal. In any case, it is not for a Western editor to become so violently partisan and misleading on the issue.

THE existence of Roy Medvedev's manuscript (which was finished in its present form in 1968) has been known for some years; it was referred to for instance by Andrei Sakharov in his *Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom*. Sakharov noted that Medvedev would regard him as deplorably unorthodox from a Marxist point of view. Even Zhores Medvedev has gone out of his way to point out that he does not share his brother Roy's attitude. And in fact a major point to be made about Medvedev's Leninist position is that it is by no means typical of the Soviet liberal intelligentsia. These intellectuals are mainly, like Sakharov himself, in some sense socialist, opposed in the abstract to the system they believe to exist in the West, with its totally unrestrained exploitation, absence of free education, of social services, and so on. But there are people who are better informed: the celebrated Program of the Democratic Opposition specifically condemns attacks on "capitalism." Even Sakharov is clear that revolution (even without bloodshed or eventual Stalinism) would not be economically beneficial to the American working class. Once it is realized that "capitalism" is in one usage a Soviet code-word for any non-Communist system—or even on occasion for an aberrant Communist system such as that of Yugoslavia—some of the confusion abates.

In any case, intellectual opposition in the USSR is not essentially concerned with Lenin and Leninism. What it looks for is the establishment of a legal and civic or-

ROBERT CONQUEST, *the British specialist in Soviet affairs, is the author of, among other works,* The Great Terror, Russia after Khrushchev, *and* The Nation Killers.

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der, of intellectual and political freedom, in the Soviet Union. Some of those who seek this may really believe that a return to Lenin would produce it; others at least find that to claim Lenin to be on their side is a useful pragmatic defense against a hostile party. In fact, when it is said that disaffected Russian writers are "really" devoted to "Communism," though wishing for a slightly different form of it than the one presently available, this is in almost every case merely a verbal matter: a preempting of the *word* Communism to mean almost exactly the opposite of what it has meant in Russia over the past half century.

Roy Medvedev is in this sense an exception, one of the few who remain unequivocally devoted to Lenin and to what he regards as Leninist principles and the Leninist style of Communism. Medvedev even hoped originally to get his book published legally in the USSR. By 1968 this was wishful thinking, but if Khrushchev had survived and evolved just a little further it is not inconceivable that the book might have appeared: it is *almost* within the range of party feeling, or what used to be party feeling. Even so, of course, some excisions might have been demanded—in particular Medvedev's hostile references to some of the Stalinists shot during the purges and since rehabilitated.

For, on Medvedev's showing, practically all Lenin's comrades and successors come out badly: Stalin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin, even Kirov. Both the oppositionists shot in the purges, and the "moderate" Stalinists who followed them to the execution cellars are heavily criticized. Although their fates are recognized as the products of a cruel and baseless frame-up, Medvedev has the courage to point out that men like Postyshev and Krylenko, now rehabilitated and held up by the "anti-Stalinist" wing of the party as true Leninists, were in fact among the most odious accomplices of Stalin during earlier phases of the terror.

But (this is of course not a new point) if Lenin was the only good and sound Bolshevik, how could he have entrusted the state to a cadre of leaders whose actions were almost invariably either mistaken or criminal? Medvedev in effect argues that Lenin was always right, while the system he created invariably produced wrong. However highly one might regard Lenin, this surely must be accounted a major, incapacitating defect in the claim that he was a faultless political leader. Either the Stalin regime, and the present situation in Russia, are the legitimate consequences of Lenin's actions—in which case he should be judged accordingly; or they are illegitimate, unforeseen—in which case Lenin must still be considered to have submitted the country to the sufferings of terror, famine, and civil war in the name of a theory which proved catastrophically defective in mastering and predicting the course of events.

Two rather contradictory strands run through Medvedev's particular presentation of Lenin. First, he holds him up as a supporter of freedom of the press—on the strength of a few promises made shortly after the seizure of power to the effect that press censorship would be a temporary measure for a few crucial weeks. Of course, Lenin broke all these promises at once, and there is no reason to believe he ever intended to keep them: after all, he simultaneously promised to honor the decisions of the Constituent Assembly, then about to be elected, even if the vote should go against the Bolsheviks; but he did not.

Secondly, Medvedev believes at the same time that Lenin was justified in his use of terror, practicing "necessary" cruelty only, as with the execution of the Imperial family. Even apart from the fact that a Czarist restoration (especially of Nicholas or his son) was already a dead issue in the Civil War, the young Grand Duchesses had in any case no claim to the succession, or to its transmission: nor did the doctor, the nurse, or the dog. Lenin in fact habitually urged terror on his sometimes reluctant subordinates; and far from being "necessary," it "made . . . victory in the Civil War more difficult," as Adam B. Ulam has observed.

On the whole Lenin period there is little here of the fairmindedness which in the main marks the author's treatment of later Soviet times. In the Civil War, for instance, all non-Communists are called "White Guards"; the peasants who oppose grain requisitioning in 1918 are all "kulaks." The Kronstadt rebellion is "counter-revolutionary." While he sees that the great public trial of Social Revolutionaries in 1922 was "not irreproachable," Medvedev exculpates Lenin and blames it on Stalin. In fact, Stalin had practically nothing to do with the trial—Lenin was very much the moving spirit—and when the Bolshevik negotiators promised the Second International that there would be no executions Lenin was furious.

Medvedev's account of the earlier years of the Bolshevik party and of the Soviet regime contains some interesting and hitherto unknown material (for example, on the quarrels in the Bolshevik Committee in Petrograd in 1917), but in general it is an exercise largely concerned to show the continual errors of Stalin. Even Stalin's *failure* in the post-revolutionary period to get involved in open opposition to Lenin is held against him as a mark of insincerity!

It would be unfair to call this a mirror image of similar exposures in Stalin's time of the party records of Trotsky and Zinoviev. For Medvedev does not stoop to positive fabrication. But all the same there is a disquieting resemblance, an uncomfortable reminder of the narrow and sectarian habits of the party mind even at its best. This holds true even in the section on the Stalin and the post-Stalin periods, when Medvedev does not suppress the actual facts but where his party-mindedness sometimes leads him into contradiction.

Thus, while criticizing Stalin's leadership of the collectivization of agriculture in the 1930's (and showing his usual post-Lenin frankness on the horrors of the 1933 famine), Medvedev yet describes it as "the major revolution, the great economic and political crisis that determined the victory of socialism." It is interesting to contrast this with Andrei Sakharov's view of collectivization as

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wom-an, *n.*—female, femme, dame, bitch, broad,chattel, biddy, little woman, frail, filly, skirt, chick, vixen, tomato, a rag of bone/a hank of hair, bimbo, moll, squaw, babe, baby doll, bag, doll, wench, weaker sex, lesser vessel.

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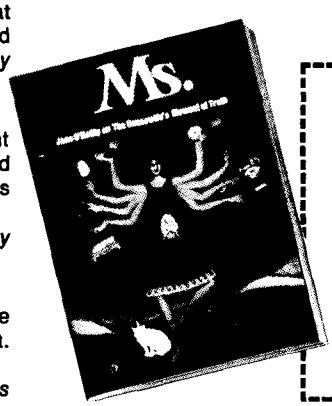

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having caused "a profound and hard-to-correct destruction of the economy and way of life in the countryside" and the "almost serf-like enslavement of the peasantry." Medvedev also follows the orthodox Soviet line on the Nazi-Soviet pact, though he does condemn the way in which Russian propaganda, and Communists outside Russia, overtly took the German side. He is full of praise for Brecht, on the strength of a poem which he wrote (but did not publish) when his friend Tetryakov was shot. But Brecht fully supported Stalinism in every other way and even in this poem proposed a ratio false to fact and insulting to the majority of victims: "Among fifty who are condemned one can be innocent." More revealingly still, Medvedev is led into condemning Stalin for having introduced a foul and horrible system of rule in the Soviet Union while at the same time hailing the extension of Stalinism to Eastern Europe as "a great victory of the world socialist revolution," and bemoaning Stalin's failure to assure similar victories in France and Italy.

There is a certain tendency among Western observers to applaud Medvedev's views above those of other Soviet liberals, just because they are "Leninist." Why? He should be praised, rather, for having liberated part of his mind from dogma, not for having failed to liberate the other part. The editors of *Let History Judge* rightly remark that "The level of analysis [and of honesty, one might add] in Medvedev's book is especially remarkable when one considers the background from which it emerges: the official school of thought on Soviet history." Just the same, there are other Soviet liberals —the majority of them in fact—who have freed themselves much more decisively from this background.

YET Medvedev's major virtue—of seeing that in the long run a party or an opinion cannot be defended on the basis of total falsehood—shines through the errors and distortions, as do the thought and labor he has put into illustrating his central point. He rightly argues that no regime with the remotest claim to intellectual legitimacy can go on treating the Stalinist experience as negligible, or nonexistent. Even in Khrushchev's time nothing like a full revelation, or repudiation, of the past was made. We are now in the absurd position of possessing *no* official story, true or false, of some of the major events of the 30's. This Medvedev has sought to correct.

Unfortunately he is (as he himself concedes) no historian. Useful though much of his new material is, it is cited mainly in episodic form as illustration of various general points. His account of the background and conduct of the great trials in Moscow is short and undetailed to the point of skimpiness. His narrative of the key February-March plenum of 1937 contains several pieces of interesting new information, but he evidently has had access to still more and has failed to record it. (All this contrasts greatly with his brother's *The Rise and Fall of T. D. Lysenko* which is clear, well-written, and uncluttered by ideological bombast, and makes out of a complex story a telling narrative which speaks for itself.)

To the student, the most useful parts of the book are the accounts of particular incidents during various stages of the terror. Medvedev adds to our knowledge of the atrocious tortures practiced and gives a number of fresh instances of the lunacy of some of the accusations. And, with many important figures, he provides information as to their fate which had hitherto not emerged from the literature of that frightful period. His sources are, first of all, various books published and speeches made in Russia which had mostly been available anyway in the West, so that much of the most striking material is not in fact new to us; secondly, various manuscripts or oral information given him by members of the families of victims of the great purge—some of these of the utmost interest and importance (though a disadvantage of the episodic approach is that there is less possibility of using these admittedly rather indirect sources to reinforce or refute one another); and thirdly, a certain amount of Western literature which has rather haphazardly penetrated Soviet circles: he cites, for example, Victor Alexandrov's *L'Affaire Toukhachevski*, which is mere invention.

AMONG the most interesting parts of the book is the section where Medvedev has assembled, from public but not widely known Soviet economic sources of fairly recent date, the (presumably) real figures on the fulfillment of the various five-year plans. (Much of this, indeed, has already been published in the West—e.g., by Professor Tibor Szamuely—though not widely remarked.) When one remembers that the terrific, but falsified, alleged successes of the Soviet economic system were one of the major propaganda themes in the West, one hopes that many readers and students will carefully study these figures.

Finally, while he sometimes appears to treat Stalin and Stalinism as a frantic aberration, Medvedev yet perceives that "although his rise to power was not inevitable, it did reflect certain tendencies that existed in our country and our party before the period of terror and then flourished because of Stalin." More generally, he gives a broad and vivid picture of Stalin as something between a Caligulan villain and a locus of disastrous imponderables. (He has no use for the rather more ambiguous attitudes of Isaac Deutscher, whom the editor feels obliged to defend against him.) Still, it is difficult to accept, for instance, his contention that Stalin's "primary motive" was revenge, since he often treated his most servile followers just as badly as those who had opposed or offended him, and the bulk of those who perished were known to him barely if at all. (A more balanced sketch, though unfortunately marred by reliance for interesting detail on doubtful or even notoriously false sources, is H. Montgomery Hyde's *Stalin: The History of a Dictator.**) And when Medvedev tells us, as a major point, that in many matters, "Stalin talked one way and behaved an-

* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 679 pp., $12.95.

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other," one can only comment, "So did Lenin."

I have not conveyed the richness of this book's detail which, whatever its defects of organization and of argument, renders it a major contribution. The peculiarity of Medvedev's opinions, the tension between his honesty and his Leninism, should not lead us to dismiss the usefulness of much of his factual material, nor should it diminish our respect for his efforts and his sincerity. Medvedev's achievement is in fact remarkable; all the repressive mechanisms of the ideology implanted in his mind have not been enough to overcome a deeper drive for the truth.

Noble Fools

THE DUAL IMAGE: THE FIGURE OF THE JEW IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE. By HAROLD FISCH. *Ktav. 149 pp. $7.50.*

THE SCHLEMIEL AS MODERN HERO. By RUTH R. WISSE. *University of Chicago Press. 134 pp. $5.45.*

Reviewed by EDWARD ALEXANDER

COLERIDGE remarked in 1833 that "The two images farthest removed from each other which can be comprehended under one term, are, I think, Isaiah—'Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!'—and Levi of Holywell Street—'Old Clothes!'—both of them Jews, you'll observe. *Immane quantum discrepant!*" Coleridge was always attracted to antinomies, and generally held that the reconciliation of opposites constituted the highest activity of the human mind. Had he followed his customary procedure with regard to antithetical images he might have asked himself whether the Jew engaged in the messianic business of prophetic denunciation bore any relation to the Jew engaged in the business of *shmattes*. But he was content, as Harold Fisch's survey of the Jew in English and American literature

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EDWARD ALEXANDER, *a new contributor, is professor of English at the University of Washington in Seattle and the author of* Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill, John Morley, *and other works.*

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shows most English writers to have been content, to set the noble biblical figure alongside the contemptible modern one, without exploring the possible link between them. Fisch argues that from the medieval stage, where veneration for Noah, Moses, and the Prophets coexists with loathing for the distinctly Jewish Devils, Vices, and Judases, to the poems of T. S. Eliot, where subhuman creatures with such un-Eliotic names as Bleistein and Rabinovitch reside in compartments hermetically sealed off from the influence of glorious neighbors called Ezekiel and Nehemiah, images of the Jew as pristinely good and radically evil, as sublime and contemptible, as divine and less than human, have simultaneously inhabited the minds of writers who made no attempt to harmonize them.

The disparity between the political success and moral grandeur of the Jews of the Bible, and the political failure and social squalor of those Jews who persisted in surviving beyond 70 C.E. and even into the 19th century did not, of course, go unnoticed by the Jews themselves. For them, the reconciliation of their central place in the scheme of messianic redemption with their beggarly role in the life of modern Europe was a necessity of psychic survival; and one important way in which they went about the task of harmonizing the "dual image" is suggested by the story which is told in Saul Bellow's *The Victim* about "a little town in the old country."

> It was out of the way, in a valley, so the Jews were afraid the Messiah would come and miss them, and they built a high tower and hired one of the town beggars to sit in it all day long. A friend of his meets this beggar and he says, "How do you like your job, Baruch?" So he says, "It doesn't pay much, but I think it's steady work."

This anti-activist and anti-apocalyptic response to the suffering which is occasioned by the apparently endless tarrying of the Messiah—of whose coming there is, however, not the slightest doubt—is the ironical solution offered to the contradiction between Jewish hope and Jewish despair by the central figure of Yiddish and of American-Jewish literature, the schlemiel. In her wise, witty, and beautifully written little book on this representative man of the *shtetl* and its American inheritors, Ruth Wisse demonstrates the relationship between the schlemiel and the Purim fool who was used by East European Jews to express the contrast between the successful statesmanship of Mordecai in the Book of Esther and the pitiful sycophancy of their own leaders trying to intercede with Gentile authorities. She further notes that by the 20th century the Yiddish poet Itzik Manger could make weakness into strength by injecting into the traditional *Megilla* story and elevating above Mordecai a poor tailor named Fastrigossa who, weak and impotent bungler that he was, tried unsuccessfully to elope with Esther and assassinate the king, and was executed for his pains. With such a story the subversion of biblical tradition was complete: the contrast between the political potency of the Jews of the Bible and the political weakness of the Jews of Eastern Europe had become a matter of reproach not to the ineffectual schlemiels and *Luftmenschen* of the *shtetl* but to Solomon, David, and Mordecai.

In his development, as Professor Wisse traces it, the schlemiel grafted onto his original endowments of weakness, self-control, and capacity to endure, the anti-intellectualism of the Chelm stories and the anti-rationalism of such philosophic fool tales as those concerning Hershel Ostropolier. Above all, in the hands of the great Hasidic storyteller Rabbi Nachman, the fool-schlemiel became a spokesman for religious faith, "than which nothing in the modern world seems more foolish." Henceforth his commitment would be to messianic rather than empirical truth, a commitment celebrated in its extreme form by I. B. Singer's 20th-century classic, "Gimpel the Fool."

The enormous burden of reconciling the Jewish knowledge of God with the Jewish experience of misery has in modern times fallen primarily on the frail shoulders of the schlemiel, both in his East European and American incarnations. Such strength as he has for this task he has derived from his irony, which characteristically expresses itself, according to Professor Wisse, in the mixture of affirmation and question: "Thou hast chosen us from among the nations —why did you have to pick on the Jews?" Such victories as the schlemiel wins consist in his continuing capacity to imagine his future, to imagine God, and to imagine himself. Sholem Aleichem's schlemiels have a powerful sense of their own identities, in despite of circumstances; Kafka's heroes have become bedbugs, thus succumbing prematurely to an environment in which it would soon become possible for Jews to be exterminated as if they *were* bedbugs.

Professor Wisse tactfully acknowledges that the essentially personal and anti-heroic response to the fundamental dualities of Jewish experience will not, and perhaps should not, satisfy everybody. ". . . All activism dismisses the schlemiel. Single-minded . . . dedication to a particular cause or specific goal cannot tolerate a character whose perception of reality is essentially dualistic." Professor Fisch, whose provocative and wide-ranging survey of the "dual image" of the Jew in literature includes Jewish as well as Gentile writers, may be thought of as one such activist. It is not only the Gentiles who show themselves incapable of achieving, "in place of the dual image, a unified image of Jewish life, in which the Jewish past and the Jewish future find real expression in the Jewish present. It is doubtful whether any Jewish writer has ever to date achieved more than a trembling intuition of such a possibility. In general, the Diaspora Jew is committed, like his non-Jewish colleague, to a version of the dual image." Fisch does not mean to say that the Jewish version and the Gentile are identical, any more than he has asserted perfect identity between the sympathetic approach to the Jews of a Christian poet like Herbert (of whom he writes well) and the malicious approach of a Christian poet like

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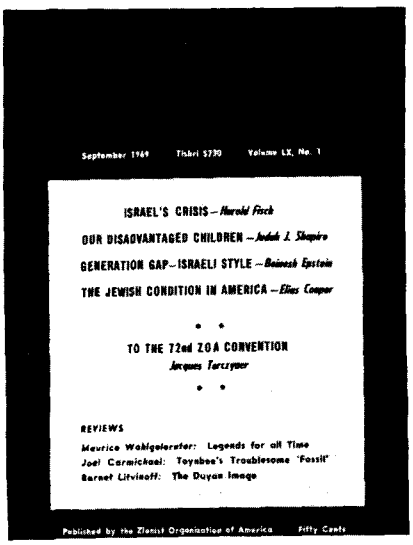
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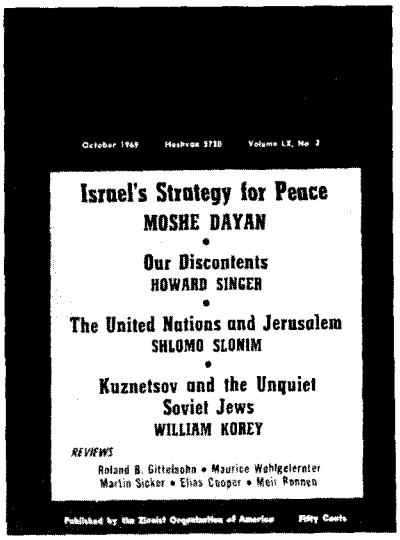
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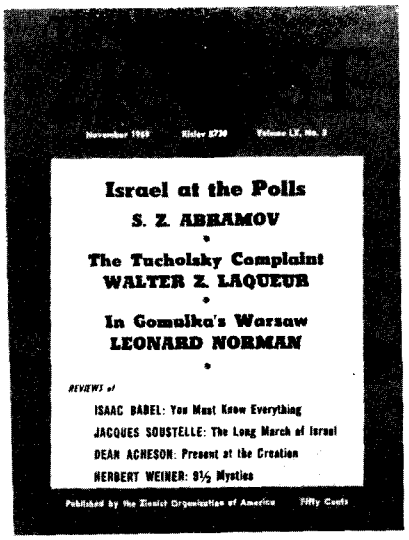
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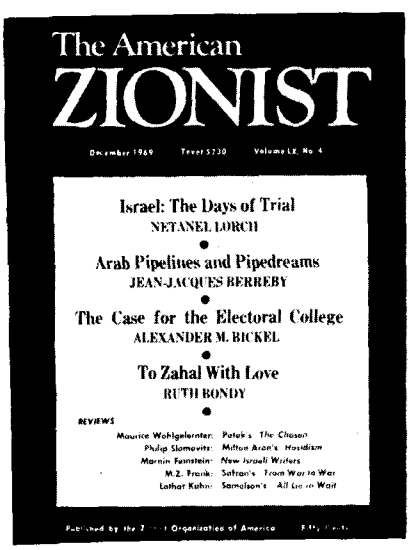
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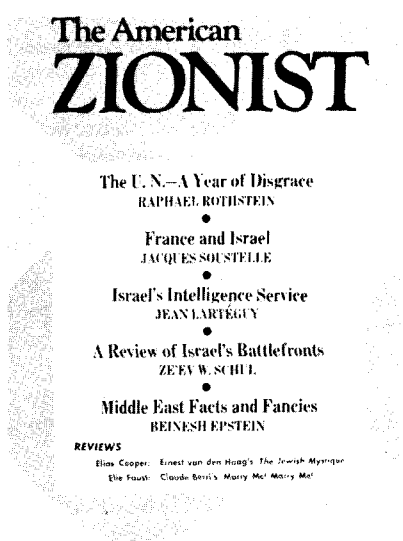

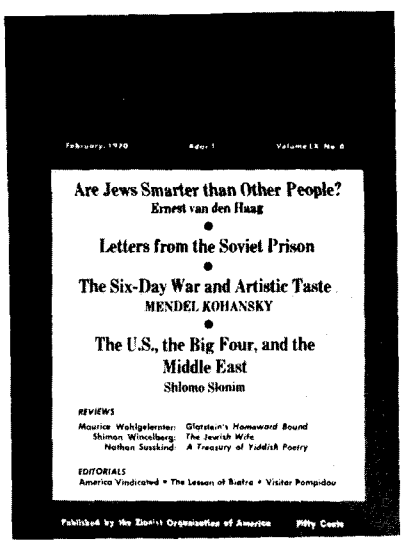
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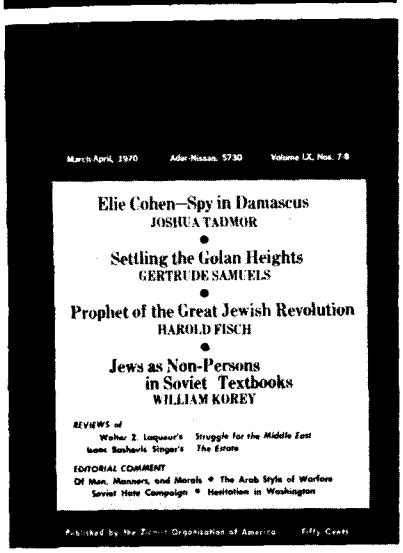
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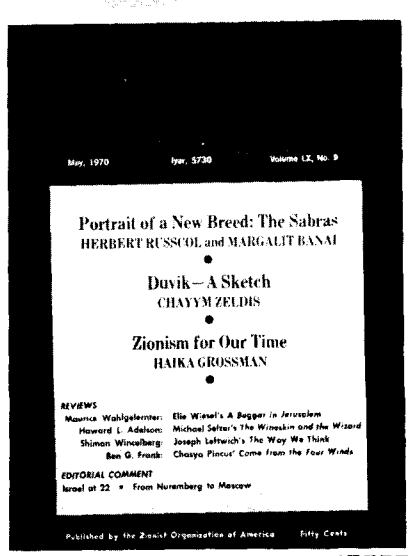
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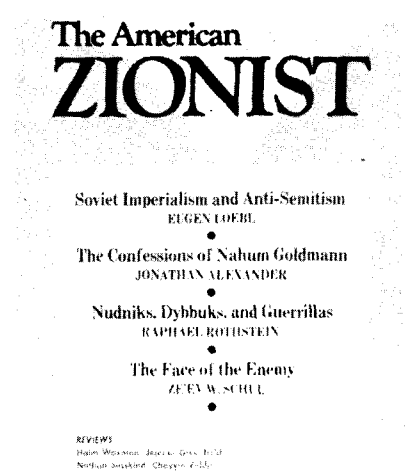

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Eliot. But he does think that the Jewish writer's dualistic perception of Jewish destiny is, like the Gentile writer's, a spiritual malady requiring a cure. The name of that cure is the title of Fisch's concluding chapter, "The Israeli Catharsis." Here we are told that the writers of the "American Jewish Renaissance" (and their British contemporaries) have "fail[ed] to register the Israeli experience"; that Saul Bellow's Mr. Sammler is the apostle of "a dying civilization, that of pre-War Bloomsbury," who goes to Israel in June 1967 because "violence fascinates him"; and that it is only in Israel that the ambiguities and dualities of Jewish life and literature can be resolved. In other words, Fisch is asking us to judge the literature in question by an extra-literary standard, and that standard is a Zionist one.

Zionism is mentioned only twice in Ruth Wisse's book. Mendele seems to have thought of the early Zionists as sentimental schlemiels, and Sholem Aleichem, with his habitual skepticism about political movements, sometimes made his characters say *tsinism* (cynicism) when they meant to say *tsionism* (Zionism). Yet all our resistance to the literary crudity of a Zionist standard for Jewish writers and its strident insistence upon—to quote Fisch—Jewish "heroism, nobility, and an inner sense of superiority in the face of evil" should not blind us to the fact that it is precisely Zionism which offers the most damaging criticism of the *political* adequacy of the schlemiel.

One of the many works whose meaning is illuminated by Professor Wisse's shrewd analysis is Sholem Aleichem's short story "Dreyfus in Kasrilevke." When Zaidl, the only Kasrilevkite who subscribes to a paper, reads to his fellow townspeople the account of Dreyfus's conviction, they in their innocence refuse to believe him: "'Such things,'" they cry, "'cannot be! No, this cannot be! It cannot be! It cannot be!'" For a Peretz, who had little use for schlemiels, such refusal to face reality was blamable. But Sholem Aleichem concludes the story with a sympathetic question that in effect endorses the *shtetl*'s faith in divine justice: "Well, and who was right?" The story, Professor Wisse observes, "contains a double irony. The ideal pits itself against reality but is finally vindicated by that same reality. Were Dreyfus not finally acquitted in the human courts of law, the schlemiel insistence on God's justice would have been less convincing."

In fact, however, at the time Sholem Aleichem wrote the story (1902), Dreyfus had gained pardon rather than acquittal (he was, as it happened, never properly acquitted under French law), and if Sholem Aleichem derived any satisfaction from the apparent resolution of the affair, he was involving himself in as grave a political blunder as any imputed to his schlemiels. The Dreyfus affair was a dress-rehearsal for the Nazi movement, but the Jews, in their collective schlemielhood, refused to see in anti-Dreyfusism an elaborately organized Pan-European political campaign against them. The Jews refused, that is, with one exception. The only visible result of the affair, says Hannah Arendt, "was that it gave birth to the Zionist movement—the only political answer Jews have ever found to anti-Semitism and the only ideology in which they have ever taken seriously a hostility that would place them in the center of world events."

No one can be more sensitive than Professor Wisse herself to the tragic, or rather the disastrous, political implications for Jewish history of the centrality of the schlemiel figure in the psychic life of European Jewry. "Throughout the process of annihilation," she remarks, "the majority of Jews refused or were unable to face reality. The hymn of the concentration camps was the *Ani Maamin*: 'I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah. And even though he is slow in coming (he is taking his own sweet time) yet even so, I believe.'" But she sees too that a historical judgment is not the same as, or the substitute for, a literary one, and that the consequences of escaping from

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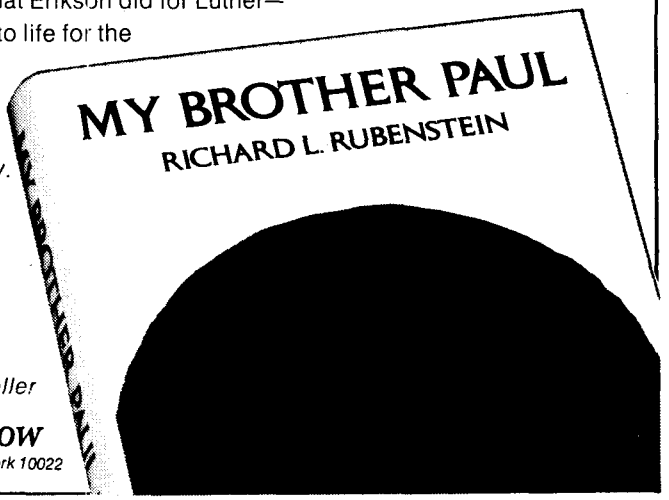

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literature into life may in the long run be as harmful as those of escaping from life into literature.

On Exhibit

MUSEUMS IN CRISIS. Edited by BRIAN O'DOHERTY. Foreword by NANCY HANKS. *Braziller. 178 pp. $6.95.*

Reviewed by ANNE HOLLANDER

IT WOULD appear from more than just the publication of this book that all existing museums of art in America are unsatisfactory to themselves, their public, or both. Or, indeed, to artists, although that dissatisfaction at least has come to seem a matter of course since the days of the *Salon des Refusés* and the invention of the artist as an alienated being. While they are continuing to suffer the usual difficulties about money, space, and choice, the whole function of art museums is now being called into question. Some enormous distortion in the general view of the past has apparently come about, so that it is now more than ever common to think of our own day as discontinuous from previous history, and the future as somehow nonexistent. To learn from past truth has become unfashionable and even slightly immoral; and in such a climate, works of art are created which have no stake in the future, no debt to the past, and so no comfortable home in the present.

Presumably, museums are safe places where works of art from the past may simply be kept and displayed, whatever their original function, matrix, or context. It is obviously impossible to grasp the entire reality of another age, even though works of art seem able to carry it with them through time; tangible, compelling, full of significance as they clearly are, the questions they constantly raise and leave unanswered nevertheless far exceed the information they can convey. It would seem wisest to insist, then, that the first duty of a museum is simply to keep, identify, and show things as a kind of act of faith, to preserve continuity for its own sake—without attempting to force the objects into or out of any context, except perhaps the simplest historical or geographical order, which would be the reflection of at least one sort of truth. Secondary responsibilities follow, to render the objects intelligible, to conserve them, and to add to them according to what is lacking.

The importance of keeping past works accessible, whether or not they are attractive to crowds or palatable to current taste, ought certainly to be the first concern of any art-historical museum, as it is of a library. Everything must be available, or it is as good as dead. It need not necessarily be shown off, but it must have some air to breathe. Underneath the dazzling main galleries of the National Gallery in London is the vast reserve collection, where second- and third- and tenth-rate paintings hang and keep something of their legitimate dignity. Although they are crowded together and poorly lit, they are on view; and, as a painter once said, the picture stops at the frame. The glories upstairs are magnificently coddled in plenty of space, excellent lighting, and air-conditioning, so that we may know them for masterpieces; but downstairs is everything else by which the standard for such masterpieces was formed, still offering its testimony. At the Metropolitan in New York, whatever is not in the galleries is put away, so that it can never catch even a vague, wandering, uninformed glance, and flash back a ray of light.

EVERYONE knows that fashion is a potent force in the training of the public eye. It operates so freely and fiercely in the marketplace that it would seem a healthy idea to keep it deliberately out of any collection of artifacts from the helpless past, which are so much subject to the shifting evaluations of fashionable taste. Rather than give the public what it wants to see, a museum should insist that it

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look at what is there—and possibly make some attempt to give it an idea why it should. Essentially most people love to look at things, and millions of dollars are made annually out of this visual lust. People love pictures at which they can stare, and although pictures that move may be more satisfying instantaneously, there is still enough greed left to soak up paintings as well as magazine photography and billboards.

In a museum, the sense of doing oneself good—socially, culturally, or spiritually—is really subordinate to the basic pleasure of looking and gaping and gawking, without exercising much judgment or paying much money. Without really knowing or caring about old pictures (which cost enormous, amazing, newsworthy sums) or new pictures (which look as if the artist were kidding), people still like to come and have a look. The greatest number will legitimately prefer to watch TV, since most of what is in museums does not especially appeal to most people's eyes, and everybody cannot like everything. Crowds have the right to stay away, while yet considerable numbers do come and look; but if public interest in works of art is artificially inflated, the museums dramatically defeat their own purpose. Acute problems arising from this have been summed up by Nancy Hanks, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts: "The situation of our museums, some threatened with permanent closure and others curtailing their activities and availability to the public, is evidence of a serious but characteristic dilemma: the greater the public interest, the greater the financial burden."

This sentence occurs in the preface to *Museums in Crisis,* which is a collection of ten essays by ten different writers, originally published together last year as a special issue of *Art in America.* Their purpose is to air the difficulties museums now face, and to try to reconcile the whole existence of museums with apparently altered conceptions of what art is for. The first essay, "Museums and Radicals," by Linda Nochlin, is a historical study centering around the fortunes of the Louvre since Napoleonic times, and the problem of transforming the wicked spoils of overthrown rulers into a national heritage—or rather of transforming an angry mob, ready to smash statues and burn paintings identified with tyranny and superstition, into an appreciative citizenry, proud of its public treasures and eager to preserve them.

Before the French Revolution there had never been any question of providing works of art for the aesthetic edification of the general public. Religious art in churches did provide something to stare at, but such art itself was meant to instruct people rather than to improve, uplift, or please them. Only with the opening of the Louvre in 1793 did the history of art museums as we know them begin—and already in a controversial and turbulent atmosphere. Later in the 19th century came the echo of cumulative political revolutions in the form of an artistic revolution, of which we are evidently still witnessing further developments. Artists arose whose radical aesthetic fervor could prompt them to call the museum a necropolis, and to desire its destruction as a symbol not of political but of aesthetic tyranny. Professor Nochlin describes Monet coming to the Louvre in 1867, to turn his back on the pictures and paint the scene outside the window, thus specifically denying the accumulated power of the past to exert any influence on his work. In the last essay in the book, however, Hugh Kenner points out that the museum finally triumphs over artists who reject its treasures by eventually including their works in its collection and forcing them into a relation to the past which they could not have foreseen. Art becomes art history whether it wishes to or not.

Professor Nochlin brings up another radical view of art, expounded by such later 19th-century idealists as Ruskin and Morris, according to whom great art must illuminate the lives of the people not by waiting to be apprehended in a museum, but by infusing itself throughout the stuff of everyday life in objects of use,

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In the May/June issue of SOCIAL POLICY:

THE NEW ASSAULT ON EQUALITY

SOCIAL POLICY begins a symposium directed at the new attacks on equality presented by Nathan Glazer, Arthur Jensen, Richard Herrnstein, Edward Banfield, et al. Articles by George Wiley, S. M. Miller and Ronnie Ratner, William Ryan, Al Hirshen and Vivian Brown, Frances Piven and Richard Cloward provide in-depth analysis of the structure of the attack, its antecedents and its consequences.

Also in the same issue:

Joel Kovel—*A Psychoanalytic Perspective on the Indo-China War*
Jonathan Kozol—*How Schools Train Children for Political Impotence*
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houses, and clothes. Since English artistic talent has only rarely expressed itself through great geniuses of painting and sculpture, English art critics might well have come to think that craft was superior to art, and a better goal for the expression of the national talent. The French conception of the artist as a private, original creator was foreign to such Victorian English ideals of public service, even through aesthetic means; and indeed it does seem wonderfully touching now that anyone ever thought people could be morally improved by daily proximity to beautiful things.

In another essay called "The Museum and the Democratic Fallacy," Bryan Robertson characterizes our own time as deprived of ornament—observe our buildings, bare inside and out—and starving for a legitimate popular art, the place of which has been usurped by the processing and stylization of artistic elements by the mass media. No great artists now work directly for the public, as Hogarth and Gillray did in the 18th century, and Lautrec with his posters in the 19th, although some forms of abstract painting have come to serve simply as ornament for our desperately undecorated walls. Mr. Robertson allows that museums may feed the starved eyes of the multitudes, but he believes that unfortunately public sensibilities are blunted, and museums are dangerously tempted to share in the general brutalizing and trivializing impulse of the time. He sees museum displays sharing in the values of the entertainment world, where instant "communication" must be established between the object and the viewer, and objects are so sensationally presented that they look as if they were for sale.

AMONG the other changes it wrought, the Industrial Revolution contributed to a shift in the role of the artist from that of a craftsman commissioned by patrons to do specific works to that of holy buffoon. Alienated, marginal, and essentially a luxury, he became a kind of aesthetic aristocrat, producing work according to the unaccountable demands of his talent alone. Ernest van den Haag, in "Art and the Mass Audience," points out that artists, once in an intimate relationship with their patrons, now lack any common language or common aspiration with their public. "Art," he says, "is no longer part and expression of life, but a special and separate domain of the artist . . . which should be worshipped and supported by his public, but not actually participated in." Museums must then exist to give art a home, since it is otherwise orphaned if not actually dead and in need of interment, as in the case of the art of the past. Like Mr. Robertson, van den Haag deplores the present museum director's fatal itch for fame and power, which will not allow him simply to tend his charges but requires him to make sensational acquisitions, provide glossy educational facilities, cater to fashionable political views, and otherwise entice the masses through his gates by every feasible means.

Van den Haag's final thrust is against any museum's impulse to collect contemporary art. The most amusing remarks on that vexed subject are in Hugh Kenner's final essay called "The Dead Letter Office," in which he deals with the exaggerated, accelerated relation established between contemporary artists and public institutions in the 1960's. Present works, he observes, are created only for museums. Pausing nowhere between the artist's studio and instant enshrinement, they must keep company only with each other, "in a world they spin out of one another's proximity. . . ." This sounds like an ironic echo of Marinetti's remark in the Futurist Manifesto of 1908, which is quoted by Linda Nochlin: "Museums are like cemeteries in the sinister promiscuousness of so many objects unknown to each other." In the contemporary museum the objects are still-born rather than buried, and unknown to anything else *but* each other. Their very existence, Max Kozloff points out in "The Contemporary Museum," has virtually been engineered by the establishment of museums dedicated to art in process, or "creativity on the wing." New works of art must be hastily cooked to feed greedy new museums; and so speedy has this process been that a decrease in status for an exhibited artist has naturally come about. Overproduction has inevitably created an "aesthetics of diffusion and a leveling of ideas." It has been a long road since the *Salon des Refusés*.

Professor Kenner likes to mention the awkward destructibility of many contemporary works (plaster people? piles of sand? cloth hamburgers?) which offer eager and conscientious museums so many more problems than mere size. Fortunately the normal fast-moving gallery-goer may absorb all these things on the run. Harold Rosenberg once described the continuous ramp at the Guggenheim Museum as a machine for having seen paintings, which would seem an ideal sort of home for much that has lately been done. Artists, nevertheless, have tried to outstrip the sprinting public by creating enormous earthworks which are inaccessible to the clutches of museums or even to the avid public eye, and so are delightfully (purposely?) doomed to neglect, decay, and quick extinction.

It is interesting to see, meanwhile, how popular the New Realism has become, full as it is of the magic power to seduce and hold the eye, to say nothing of its tendency to come in manageable sizes. These works, with their pubic hair, nuts and bolts, peeling paint, etc., are clearly meant to be stared at and stared at, just like Frith's "Derby Day" (1858) or "The Last Day in the Old Home" (1862) with their thousands upon satisfying thousands of perfect details.

Several essays in this volume deal quite specifically with the delicate problems of directors, curators, and trustees; with the educative function of museums, particularly those connected with universities; and of course with the grim subject of money, its sources and uses. The best, and best written, of this whole group are the theoretical ones. Ready solutions are not provided for all the enormous, paralyzing present difficulties; and the end of the book finds Hugh Kenner foresee-

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ing the history of 20th-century art as a death struggle with the museum, the latter foredoomed, "art being unkillable." Afterward the museum will be obsolete: all the great works of the past will be quietly returned to their original homes, future art will find more interesting things to do, and the Age of Museums will have come to an end.

In the Tradition

A FEAST OF HISTORY: PASSOVER THROUGH THE AGES AS A KEY TO JEWISH EXPERIENCE. By CHAIM RAPHAEL. *Simon & Schuster. 250 pp. Illustrated. $12.50.*

Reviewed by DAVID DAICHES

"THESE must be removed at Passover," says the Mishnah (*Pesachim*, 3:1): "Babylonian porridge, Median beer, Edomite vinegar, and Egyptian barley-beer; also dyers' pulp, cooks' starch-flour, and writers' paste. R. Eliezer says: Also women's cosmetics." All these things are *chametz*, which is anything fermented or in process of fermenting. On the eve of Passover "the *chametz* must be searched for by the light of a lamp." But suppose you think that a weasel may have dragged *chametz* from house to house, or even from place to place? When the Jewish householder searches for *chametz* on Passover eve, in order to destroy it, he must not allow thoughts about peripatetic weasels to involve him in an endless search, for once he begins to think along those lines, say the rabbis, "There is no end to the matter." That way madness lies: the *chametz* searcher should keep soberly to immediate practicalities.

To our surprise, perhaps, the Mishnah does exactly that. Though it contains a whole tractate called *Pesachim*, all about Passover, that tractate is concerned mainly with the nature of the Passover offering in Temple times and, toward the end, with certain details of the Seder celebration. It contains no speculation about the origin of the festival, the development of the Seder, or the psychological and historical significance of that extraordinary symposium (in the literal Greek sense) which has kept pace with Jewish history in its ability to embody, reflect, and illuminate changing aspects of Jewish experience throughout the ages. It is precisely all this that Chaim Raphael's book does give us. It is, in a very rich sense, "a feast of history," and Mr. Raphael, eschewing the Mishnaic injunction to keep to the practicalities, has followed the movement of symbolic weasels from place to place; in doing so he has produced a fascinating history of the Passover Haggadah, a history of the celebration of the Seder, an account of the origins of Passover synthesized from the best modern scholarship on the subject, a meditation on the varying meanings of the Seder in different times and circumstances, and a beautifully printed Hebrew text of the Haggadah with

DAVID DAICHES, *the English literary critic, is professor of English at the University of Sussex.*

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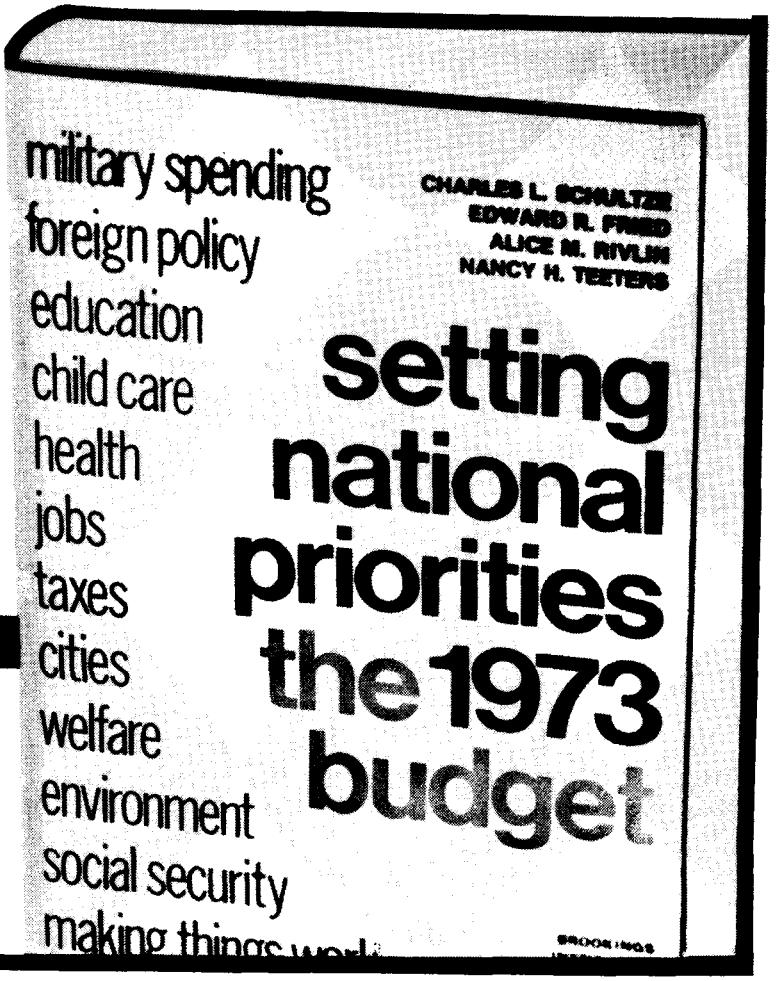

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his own translation and commentary. All this is given in a marvelously illustrated book, in which we find vivid visual presentation of innumerable aspects of Jewish iconography, manuscript illumination, and biblical history and scenery as seen by artists old and new.

Mr. Raphael walks warily and wittily between the simple religious faith of those who see in the Passover celebration an age-old commemoration of the exodus from Egypt transmitted in all its details from antiquity, and the scholarly investigations of anthropologists, archaeologists, comparative religionists, and others who research into origins, influences, syntheses, and transformations. He is anxious to show that anthropological explanations of the origin of a festival need not impair its validity as a significant religious and national act, and can indeed make that act more pregnant with historical meanings. The ways in which a primitive sacrifice to mark the spring equinox, or a "firstling sacrifice" by herdsmen on the eighth day after the birth of an animal, or a fertility ritual to insure the fruitfulness of the coming season's crops and herds, or a pre-historical cultic drama with the smeared blood of the sacrificed animal used as a prophylactic against misfortune in the coming year—the ways in which any or all of these were eventually refined in the light of Hebrew national and religious experience into the Passover we know provide abundant material for scholarly speculation. Some of this speculation is cited by Raphael with a half-apologetic air, but he succeeds admirably in showing the fascination of this kind of theorizing and its consistency with a full acceptance of the central meaning of the Passover in Jewish life throughout the ages.

Sometimes he brings the traditionalist up with a shock, as when he reminds him that there is doubt even about the etymology of the word *pesach*. The Hebrew root can mean to pass through, to pass over, to spare, to halt, to waver in opinion, or to limp (or to dance with a limping motion). Was there originally a "limping dance festival" linked with fertility rites? This seems very far-fetched, and Mr. Raphael raises the suggestion only to suggest strong reasons for rejecting it. Perhaps originally the festival involved "a ritual going-forth from the city to the country . . . rites of purification which include fasting, the wearing of new clothes, processions, sacrifices and feasting?" Perhaps. Philo, with his Platonizing interests, interpreted the "passing over" to be a symbol of the lover of wisdom crossing over from the physical passions to virtue.

Mr. Raphael chats engagingly about these and other interpretations, but keeps returning to the Jewish folk tradition, to rabbinical anecdote and popular feeling, reminding us that a rich savoring of this aspect of Passover can coexist with the intellectual pleasure in speculating about origins. And he further anchors his speculations in reality by projecting concrete pictures of Passover celebrations by soldiers in wartime, by concentration-camp inmates, by Marranos who faced denunciation and burning at the stake if their Seder was discovered, by medieval Jews threatened with blood-libel, by modern Jews in Western comfort or in Oriental picturesqueness or in the communal nationalism of the kibbutz. Above all, he shows us the Passover celebrations and the recital and singing of the Haggadah as bound up with living and changing Jewish history of the last two thousand years at least. In fact, Mr. Raphael has used the Haggadah as the thin end of a wedge whose thick end is all of Jewish experience.

In his "note on the translation" Mr. Raphael tells us that for the Psalms and other biblical passages in the Haggadah he has used the King James Version, for in it "one hears 'ancient' words which have entwined themselves into English literature with something of the same mysterious, evocative power that the original Bible exercises over Hebrew literature." But in the songs "some attempt has been made to convey the mood of the original imaginatively." This seems sensible, and some of his free renderings of songs are rather jolly—particularly that of *va-amartem zevach Pesach* as "On Passover Day in the Morning." In translating the prayers and blessings and the affirmations in the Haggadah Mr. Raphael

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avoids a consciously biblical style and seeks for something which, while faithful to the tradition underlying the original, yet speaks "in an English that reflects our own voice." In doing this, he has felt compelled to abbreviate on occasion, cutting out elaborations and repetitions and all those parallel expressions in series so dear to the Hebrew liturgical genius. This is also true of the rabbinical discussions which, he feels with some reason, might seem a bit long-winded to the ordinary modern reader. Some of these he cuts quite drastically in translation. The result is, inevitably, inconsistency. On one page *chayav adam* ("man must," "one is obliged") is rendered "every Jew must," while on the next page, where we find the same phrase in the plural *(l'phichach anachnu chayavim l'hodot,* etc., "we therefore have a duty to thank . . ."), it is completely ignored; here, the whole long sentence is rendered simply as, "At this moment, then, we thank God," which omits the introductory suggestion of the *reason* for thanking God and the sense that it is a *duty*. But this does not really matter, as the general sense is conveyed with fine vigor, though I can't help wondering what would happen to someone with a little Hebrew who was counting on the English translation to help him out. Surely there must be a great number of such people who read the Haggadah on the Seder night, and they will be confused by some aspects of Mr. Raphael's translation. He seems to have designed his edition for those who either can read it in Hebrew or who can read it only in English, which is perhaps too pessimistic a polarization of Jewish readers. Am I wrong in assuming that there is a vast middle ground of readers who want the translation to help them in their imperfect understanding of the original?

But this is a minor point. Mr. Raphael's style and manner tempt one to digress and argue, as indeed the style of the Haggadah itself does. One's general view of this book must be enthusiastic. It is both an admirable introduction to Jewish history and an unusually lively and informative edition of the Haggadah.

Populist Tycoon

HENRY FORD AND GRASS-ROOTS AMERICA. By REYNOLD M. WIK. *University of Michigan Press. 266 pp. $10.00.*

Reviewed by BARRY GEWEN

IS THERE any single person who did more to transform America from a land of family farms and small towns into a modern, urban, corporate, technologized, mass society than Henry Ford? True, he may have done it all while working behind his back, a man of vision following yesterday's models, but if we think labels like "genius" or "hero" do not exactly fit him, and that the Flivver King looks a little ridiculous carrying them around, still the fact remains that he is the only customer in the store. Once we accept the reality of an industrialized consumer economy, Henry Ford is elevated to the first rank in our history—Aldous Huxley understood this in his written rejection of the new America, and so did Lenin, who once said that Communism would never come to the United States as long as Ford was alive. (In the Soviet Union, where his autobiography was used as a textbook in the universities, Ford was thought of not as a capitalist but as a revolutionary.) No doubt about it: Henry Ford is a giant of the 20th century, a person to reckon with, an ambiguous, troublesome, quirky, Janus-like man who, to the chagrin of his biographers, simply will not be pinned down or pigeonholed; he is also one of those historical figures with "personality," offering up enough anecdotes, epigrams, and eccentricities to delight any reader. Was he a progressive or reactionary? Populist or technocrat? Prophet or anachronistic rube? Or do any of these appellations matter when we can picture

BARRY GEWEN *is a young historian living in New York.*

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him sitting in front of his fifty-six room mansion beside his friend, the black scientist George Washington Carver, another health-food nut, munching away on a grass-and-dandelion sandwich?

So the books about him keep coming. Already we have the massive three-volume study of the man and the corporation by Allan Nevins and Frank Hill to show us the direction in which Ford (and the country) was actually moving, and now Reynold M. Wik arrives, with a more modest book, to remind us where Ford came from.

He came from a farm in the Middle West, from the same populist world that produced men like Charles Lindbergh and William Jennings Bryan; as with them, there was a way in which Henry Ford, whatever fame and power he achieved, never really left the farm. Certainly for all of his technological insight he never shed the values, the mentality, that the American heartland in the late 19th century bred into its children. But then, of course, there was no reason why he should have: the son of a farmer, he was a tinkerer-genius with a farmer's faith in the old-fashioned pieties: he believed in Prohibition and the small-family enterprise, he distrusted Wall Street and the world of corporate finance—the only difference was that *his* family business was not a general store somewhere in rural Michigan but the Ford Motor Company. And with support like that behind him, what possible motive could a man have to change his ideas? Rather, it was only logical that Ford would reason in the other direction, seeing his success as confirmation of those ideas which had been instilled in him since birth, his achievement as the vindication of what he believed.

"Common men" across the country drew the same conclusion—Ford identified with them against the Eastern Establishment and they reciprocated by wanting to make him President of the United States. Henry Ford's stature, his global importance, merely affirmed what they already believed, and what they wanted to believe. He was a billionaire, but dirt farmers wrote to him as if he were the guy who plowed the spread down the road. Wik estimates that over a twenty-year period, Ford received almost two thousand letters daily, on every subject from politics to poetry, proposing wild business ventures, relating intense personal tragedies, letters of comedy, letters of the highest seriousness. A Georgia woman wrote: "Boozy girls are hauled about by drunken men screaming with laughter over pinches by promiscuous hands on any part of their bodies. Now Henry, I want you to do something about all this." Bartolomeo Vanzetti's last letter went to Henry Ford, thanking him for his efforts on Sacco and Vanzetti's behalf.

FORD had the rare good fortune to accomplish what he set out to do without ever having to confront any challenge to his most fundamental principles, and by the time such challenges did come, he was already on top and could afford to insulate himself from those aspects of reality which he chose to ignore. The only exception to this was the furor that developed over anti-Semitism in the early 20's, a controversy he simply could not avoid. Ford had come out of a milieu where to be a Christian was already practically to be an anti-Semite. Rather than a belief actively pursued, anti-Semitism was something that had been bred into Ford's bones; like his entire social philosophy, it was less conscious than reflexive. Which is hardly to excuse it. After all, his newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, was putting out material that a Father Coughlin or Gerald L. K. Smith would have felt comfortable mouthing, and sometimes it was even more chilling: "The main source of the sickness of the German national body is charged to be the influence of the Jews, and although this was apparent to acute minds years ago, it is now said to have gone so far as to be apparent to the least observing. . . . It is the belief of all classes of the German people that the collapse which has come since the armistice, and the revolution from which they are being prevented a recovery, are the result of Jewish intrigue and purpose. . . . But the Germans will doubtless prove themselves equal to the situation by devising methods of control at once unobjectionable and effective."

A reaction was certainly to be expected, but Ford seems neither to have expected it nor understood it because he had lived with ideas like these all his life. In his public apology to the American Jewish Committee, all that he could bring himself to say was: "Trusted friends with whom I have conferred recently have assured me in all sincerity that in their opinion the character of the charges and insinuations made against the Jews, both individually and collectively, contained in many of the articles which have been circulated periodically in the *Dearborn Independent* and have been reprinted in the pamphlets mentioned, justified the righteous indignation entertained by Jews everywhere toward me because of the mental anguish occasioned by the unprovoked reflections made upon them." These are the words of a man unequipped to comprehend any world other than the one he had been born into.

THE AJC accepted Ford's apology and the furor died, but more than apologies were necessary to deal with the problems that developed in the late 20's and early 30's, and in the face of them Ford retreated rather than change. He had always produced exactly the car he wanted to produce, and because his sensibility was so close to that of millions of Americans, it turned out that the Model T was the car they wanted produced also. Now, however, there was competition from General Motors, an institution that was anything but a family business. GM employed modern business and marketing techniques, and brought out a variety of models to meet a variety of tastes, thereby occasioning Ford's classic comment: "People can have the Model T in any color—so long as it's black."

He had been a progressive and benevolent employer, his policy

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on racial discrimination well ahead of its time. And when he introduced the famous five-dollar day in 1914, the publisher of the New York *Times* blew up: "He's crazy, isn't he? Don't you think he's crazy?" But the rise of labor unions challenged another cherished Ford belief and his response was both unrealistic and totally inadequate: "The average employee in the average industry is not ready for participation in the management. An industry, at this stage of our development, must be more or less of a friendly autocracy."

But finally, and most important, there was the Depression, which severed his ties to the common man, denied him his roots, and left him stranded with nothing but his unique identity as a populist billionaire. The Depression was the proof, if any was needed, that America had come a long way from the world as Ford liked to imagine it (assisted, of course, by a mighty shove from the auto magnate himself), but when disaster struck, Ford's solution was to vote for Hoover and recommend that people leave the cities and get back to the farms. Naturally, as Wik documents, the joke was not lost on the people who had been his staunchest supporters in the 20's, the people who were already there. From wanting to run him for President ten years before, they were now writing in to say: "Stick with your pistons and gear grease. As a prophet of the Lord you never would have got out of old Egypt land." And once it was clear that Ford was in fact far removed from his roots, that he no longer understood what had once been a certainty, there was nothing to hold him down, and he simply floated away into isolation and eccentricity. Wik's book stops, charitably, with the early 30's.

FORD and the common man: it is a fascinating topic that Wik has chosen to treat, but *Henry Ford and Grass-Roots America* does not come up to expectations. Remove Ford from its center and practically all that remains is a pile of index cards, neatly stacked and carefully collated. Commenting, for example, on the changes Ford wrought in the lives of farmers, Wik says that the Model T made family camping trips more feasible, and then proceeds to detail: "The most simple camping technique involved sleeping on the ground beside the car wrapped up in a blanket. . . . Another method consisted of converting the auto into a pullman by putting hinges on the front seat permitting it to fold back and form a bed. . . . The use of tents provided yet another type of camping comfort. . . . Still a further method of camping made use of a panel truck built on the standard automobile chassis"—with *each* of these sentences wearily dragging along a paragraph of somnolent exposition behind it. A chapter devoted to communications and complaints from Model-T owners cites letter after letter, example upon example, as if Wik were intent not only to establish that he has labored away in the archives at Dearborn but also wanted his readers to taste a bit of that labor for themselves.

The essential problem, I think, is in the book's conception. *Henry Ford and Grass-Roots America* sounds like history but is really nostalgia written by a man who can still remember his family's Model T on a farm in South Dakota. Wik remains sentimentally attached to his subject, with the result that he has not been able to find a point of view and has ended by disguising a personal reminiscence as weak history. Ford is fascinating—we can appreciate him at a distance, much the way we admire a Frank Capra movie or a Norman Rockwell painting—but we must be willing to let go of Ford's world, to recognize that we are irretrievably separated from it. Otherwise, nostalgia blurs the edges that history should sharpen.

To relegate Henry Ford to history, however, is hardly to dismiss him. Indeed, how can we ignore Ford in 1972? Populism is in the air again—at least the word is (shortly after World War II George Orwell remarked that "fascism" had already been shorn of all meaning save as "something not desirable," and today, when everyone from George Wallace to Jack Newfield is passing himself off as a populist, we might indeed wonder what is left of the word other than "something desirable"); and the life of Henry Ford, a genuine populist if a strange one, reminds us of the danger inherent in the populist appeal. In a world of change, the reliance on static, inherited beliefs to arrive at political positions can all too easily transform a progressive impulse, genuinely concerned with human grievances, into a stance that is as unrealistic as it is reactionary. Ford's example, after all, especially his retreat in later life, is hardly unique, even if his money did provide him with a personal safety valve. There is a kind of inexorable, if unhappy, logic to the populist approach, since appeals to "the people" in time and almost of necessity produce attacks upon the "enemies of the people." And the search for scapegoats, as we should have learned by now, is in the interest of no one at all.

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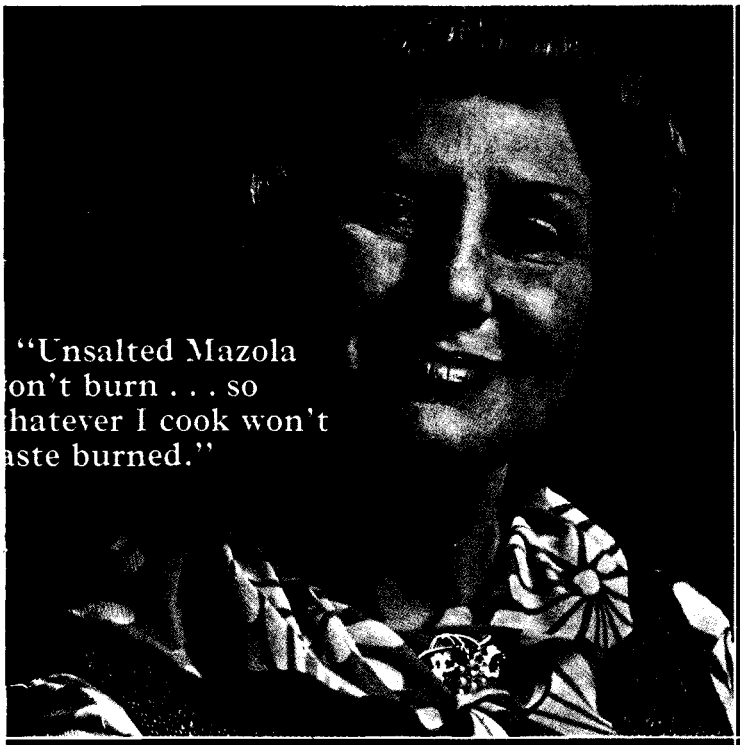

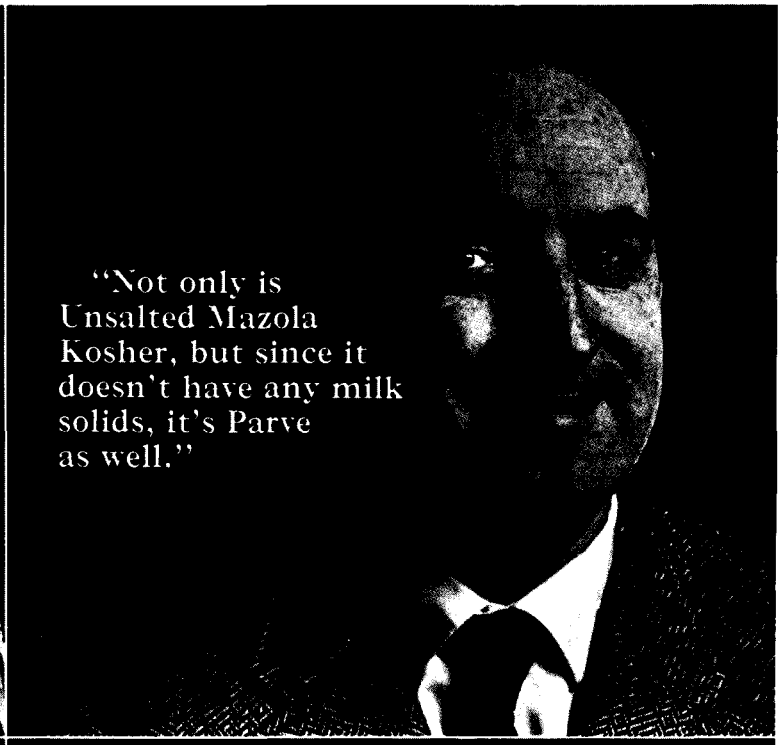

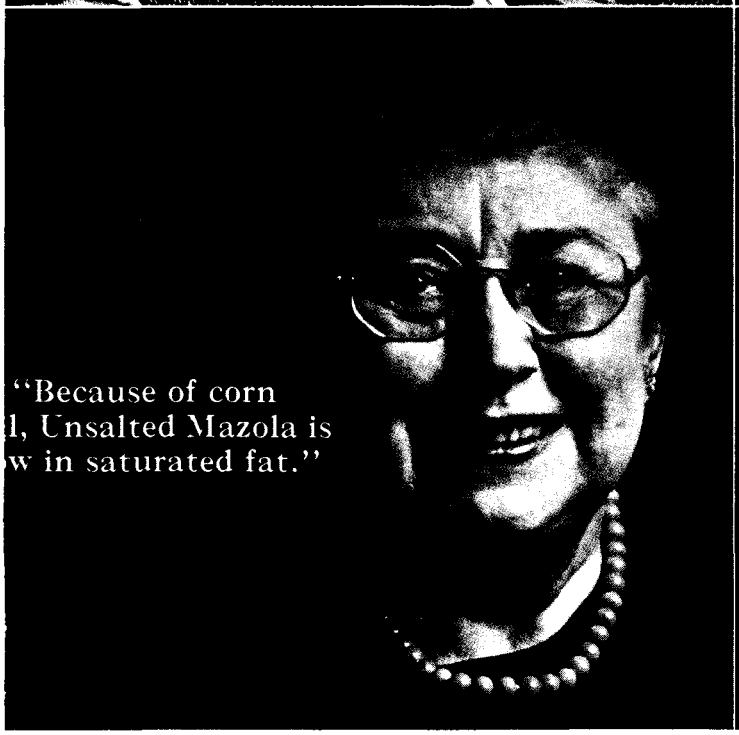

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